

THE FIVE FLAMBOYS

FRANCIS BEEDING

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By Francis Beeding

THE SEVEN SLEEPERS

THE LITTLE WHITE HAG

THE HIDDEN KINGDOM

THE HOUSE OF DR. EDWARDES

THE SIX PROUD WALKERS

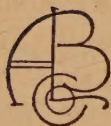
PRETTY SINISTER

THE FIVE FLAMBOYS

THE LEAGUE OF DISCONTENT

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By FRANCIS BEEDING



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THE FIVE FLAMBOYS

CHAPTER I

I AM IN AT THE DEATH

"That is all I have to say for the present, Meester Baxter. Ye can tak' it or ye can leave it, just as ye will. Think it over and come back to me here in an hour."

I would not dare to reproduce the grave music of pure Scots, but this was a base imitation, like the man himself. There was once, as you know, a Jew who went to Glasgow, but shortly left the city because he was unable to thrive. Shadrach Lowenstein, however, had remained. Angus McGuffie he had the impertinence to call himself, and you could cut his Scots with a knife.

I turned about, walked across the over-furnished room, pushed open the door and slammed it behind me. Let the sun go down on your wrath. I had somehow to keep on speaking terms with Angus McGuffie, and the only way to do that was to say nothing for the present.

I stood outside the florid door, staring at the ridiculous scroll work upon the panel. So I was to return in an hour. Should I even then be sufficiently calm?

I walked down the unending gravel drive, with its clipped laurel bushes on either side from which the house took its name. Angus McGuffie, indeed. But the fellow did it rather well, all things considered. Short of wearing a kilt he could hardly be more complete. Not bad for a man, name of Shadrach, born in a Polish or Roumanian ghetto. It was not only the accent, carefully mastered and used on every possible occasion. He even looked like a Scotsman, being blue-eyed, with high cheekbones, not too tall, with

little nose to speak of and a careful, precise manner which he took pains to exaggerate. That was Shadrach Lowenstein, the world's worst money lender, who was coolly proposing to ruin my brother if payment were not at once forthcoming. All for a paltry three hundred pounds, though the fellow must be rolling. But that presumably was how he came to be rolling, by putting the screws on his victims. He could not really need the money. Or was he speaking the truth for once and was he indeed hard up? He had seemed, I thought, ill at ease and a trifle loose about the lower lip.

"Come back to me here in an hour"; and in an hour I should be told once more "to tak' it or leave it." My brother must pay up or he would drag him into the courts and have him slung out of the regiment. I cursed myself for a fool, for it was I who had recommended Ted to go to him. I felt in a sense responsible. I could have kicked myself as I stood at the white painted gate and looked up at the high downs.

Something must be done, but I hadn't a notion as yet what it would be. I certainly could not raise the money myself. A junior official on the Secretariat of the League of Nations cannot raise three hundred pounds as easily as that. But Ted, nevertheless, had left it to me, having himself seen Shadrach in London to no purpose. Ted had told me of that interview, swearing horribly, two days ago when we had dined at his club, and he was now on his way to Egypt with his regiment. So I had promised to follow Shadrach to his handsome villa in Freshwater, Isle of Wight.

"Not a bean between us," as Ted had remarked. "Shadrach will have to be squared. You must play on his weaknesses, old boy."

But men like Shadrach haven't any weaknesses. Ted was always an optimist. Early to bed and early to rise —

that was the sort of man Shadrach was — the last in the world to give himself away — except, of course, in his clothes. For oft the apparel doth proclaim the man. Shadrach was always very carefully dressed, in striped trousers, black coat, butterfly collar, grey tie, with a good pin in it — rather too good a pin, the diamond a trifle too large. He had been dressed just like that a moment before when I had been talking to him. And white spats, of course. Rings on his fingers and spats on his toes. I was forgetting the spats. Shadrach would die in spats. I sometimes wonder if he hadn't been born in them.

There's another thing I was forgetting. Shadrach had, after all, a weakness, though I did not quite see how to play upon it. Every one must have some outlet, inspiration, glimpse within the tavern, release from the wheel of things, call it what you please. Shadrach's was chewing gum. That was wine, women and song to Shadrach. I believe if it had come to the point, he would in sheer fellow feeling have stood a man a stick of it.

Unfortunately, I was unprovided — very careless of me, for I might perhaps have softened him. All I had with me were the arguments which I had recited in front of my shaving mirror that morning at the club, and they had no effect whatever on Shadrach.

"Your brother," he had informed me, "is a fortnight over-due." That was all he would say in answer to my appeal. I had asked for three months, but Shadrach had seemed to find my request so outrageous that I had begun to have an uneasy feeling that he really needed the money. Otherwise he was a very good actor, though that sort of acting is second nature, I suppose, to a money lender. The most I could get out of him, was another month's grace for Ted, and an hour to think it over.

I strode out of the gate and followed a narrow lane that led steeply up to the downs. How to rescue Ted from

the clutches? I thought for a moment of selling my car, but remembered just in time that I had not yet paid for it. People go to prison, I believe, for that sort of thing. The position was quite absurd, but there it was. I could not raise three hundred pounds any more than my young brother. Shadrach must "show a bit of mercy." For the twentieth time I considered that solution, and then, remembering the face of Shadrach, I tried to think of something else.

I had in my anger walked rather fast up a hill that must have been about one in four. I was now climbing the open downs, sprinkled with cropping sheep and bright with patches of gorse. On the summit in front of me was Tennyson's monument, a beacon for sailors coming up from the Needles. I climbed to the high stone cross and the sea broke suddenly before me, far down, at the base of the white cliff, so far down that the surface seemed scarcely to be wrinkled.

It was a wonderful day in late August. A light wind blew from the south; there was sunlight all about me; and below me sped two wheeling gulls, a flash of pearl and silver as they turned and dipped.

In two days I should be once more in Geneva. That was an added complication. The Assembly of the League of Nations meets always in September and, as a member of the Secretariat, I could by no manner of means arrange to be absent during that time. During the Assembly, though little can be done, a great deal has to be said, and it is my duty as a recording secretary, or *précis* writer as they call us, to regard what is said as of importance to the world.

I moved a little away from the edge of the cliff. It was hot, but the breeze was refreshingly cool. The turf sprang under the foot, and the larks were singing brilliantly. It was my last little bit of England, and yet I

was insensitive. I had only one thought. Shadrach must be done in the eye.

But there was soon to be a diversion — a soft drumming of hoofs on the turf, and a second or two later a small Shetland pony came into sight over a lower shoulder of the down. On the back of the pony was a boy, still no more than a child, shouting with delight. A very pretty picture they made, the boy and the pony, as they came at me over the springy turf. He was a fine boy, with a straight back and a face tanned by the sun. He sat his pony very well, hands low. But accidents will happen. The pony stumbled suddenly as it came abreast of me. It had put a foot into one of the rabbit holes with which the cliff was honeycombed. The beast was so close to me when it happened that the boy, thrown over the pony's neck, fell straight into my arms, while the pony, recovering by a miracle, pattered past us and bolted down to the west as fast as his short legs would carry him.

I stood a moment holding the child, and he looked up at me with his black eyes wide open and the suspicion of a quiver about the mouth, so that I thought he would burst into tears. But immediately the upper lip was stiffened.

"Peter doesn't cry," he informed me, with a charmingly impersonal air.

Thereupon he slipped quietly to the ground and stood on the turf beside me, holding tightly to my right hand.

At that moment there came a sound of footsteps, and I saw a girl running up the slope, a trifle out of breath and, be it mentioned with respect, just a little red in the face. The boy turned quickly towards her.

"Peter," said the girl, "you are a bad lad. You nearly took a toss that time."

She looked as she spoke, not at me, but towards the

three-hundred-foot precipice. To turn pale was beyond her, after that run uphill on an August day, but I could see that she went quite remarkably pale within. As for me, I stared at the girl completely shattered. For it had taken me about half a second to recognise the voice and to identify the owner, as she stood there still panting a little from her run and holding Peter, whoever he was, tight by the hand.

This was an old friend of mine, name of Ann Winspeare, and from the look of it she was going to be difficult. Ann was usually difficult.

She looked me up and down slowly.

"Ann," I began hastily.

"Mr. Baxter," she responded.

"Why this formality?" I protested. "Plain John is good enough for me!"

She stared at me in no very friendly fashion, and I stared back at her as best I could. The staring part was easy, for all the Winspeares — five of them, if I remember rightly — are pretty.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Making the acquaintance of Peter," I replied.

She looked at me more searchingly — almost as though I were up to no good.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I could hardly avoid it in the circumstances. He simply fell into my arms."

She said nothing to that.

"He might have done worse," I added, glancing, as I spoke, towards the edge of the cliff.

Ann blenched.

"Thank you, Mr. Baxter," she said. "I'm glad, for once, you were there."

I bowed in acknowledgment of this concession. The boy had moved a short distance away from us. He was gazing with rapt attention at two destroyers which were moving

swiftly, like gnats, over the glassy waters in the light autumnal haze which was creeping over the sea.

"Relative of yours?" I enquired.

"No," she said.

"Looking after him, perhaps," I suggested.

"Yes," she said.

I sighed inwardly. This was a nicely affable companion for a fellow whose favourite brother was on the rocks and who was himself going to spend the winter in Geneva. Why was it that Ann and I must always be sparring? It wasn't seemly.

"Do you," I asked, "remember the last time we met?"

"It was at Lady Clandoy's ball," she answered promptly, "and you behaved disgracefully."

"We both behaved disgracefully," I amended.

"Not at all," said Ann. "I merely told you what I thought of you."

"You oughtn't to have such thoughts," I pointed out. "Incidentally, I never told you what I thought of *you*."

I never had told Ann what I thought of her. Now and then I had made an effort, but she was always so discouraging.

"Better tell me the worst," she said. "It's bad for people to suppress things."

I looked at her doubtfully. Was it an invitation? There was the ghost of a twinkle in her eye.

"I thought you looked perfectly ravishing," I ventured rashly. "You were wearing the green and gold."

Ann froze.

"John," she said, "you've been living too much abroad. Or is it the hot weather."

"Damn it, Ann —" I began hotly.

"That's better," she said evenly. "It's plain, sensible English at any rate. And now perhaps, instead of reminding me of a frock which I was obliged to wear till I

was sick of the sight of it, you will complete the good work and see if you can catch Peter's pony."

"Won't you introduce us?" I suggested. "I like the look of Peter."

The boy turned and regarded us with solemn eyes. Ann went up and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Just Peter, for the moment," she said.

"I'm looking after him," she added by way of explanation. "We do lessons together, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't like lessons," Peter said, and there seemed to be the trace of a foreign accent in his speech.

"We neither of us like them very much," said Ann. "Lessons are an awful bore, aren't they, Peter?"

"But I like Ann," Peter hastened to assure us. "She knows everything," he added confidentially.

Nice to be Peter, I thought. He liked Ann and was able to say so—just like that. I looked at them a moment and remembered the pony. I should cut a better figure catching the pony than standing there unable to tell Ann what I thought of her. The conversation, as usual, threatened to be one-sided.

I moved off obediently, reflecting on the oddness of life, as many a better man had done before me. Out of evil had come good and all that sort of thing. I had spent half a day of my precious leave coming down to the Isle of Wight to see Angus McGuffie, and now I had met lovely Ann Winspeare. She seemed to be masquerading as a sort of governess. That was rather a poor thought, but it was her father's fault. Alfred Winspeare was the second son of an impecunious peer. That was his first mistake. His second was to have five daughters, only one of whom was Ann. Ann had now and then touched on the matter of what she would do when the rocks were really in sight. No typing or shorthand for her—even if she could learn

the stuff, which she doubted. Well, apparently, she had solved her problem — not a very original solution perhaps, but the Winspeares were always strong conservatives.

It was too warm an afternoon to hurry much, and, as luck would have it, I had not far to go, for I had hardly reached the bottom of the slope before I saw the pony being led towards me by a thickset man with a black moustache and a hard weather-beaten face. The man was hot and anxious. He hailed me as soon as he got within speaking distance.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, touching his hat, "but you haven't seen a young lady with a young gentleman in the neighbourhood?"

"Yes, I have," said I and pointed vaguely in the direction from which I had come.

The hard-faced man was obviously relieved. He produced a spotted handkerchief and wiped his brow.

"Fell off, I suppose," he said bitterly. "It's just one thing after another, and in this weather, too. Run off my feet the whole blinking day. The missus reckons as 'ow I've lost ten pounds in a week. It ain't no joke, sir, looking after the son of a millionaire."

I nodded in sympathy.

"Son of a millionaire, is he?" I observed. "Nice little chap."

The hard-faced man grunted and made no reply. Was it something in the island air? Conversation did not seem to flourish in these parts. I took the bridle of the pony and started back again up the slope. The hard-faced man accompanied me and I found I had done him an injustice. For he suddenly became hoarse and confidential.

"See 'im?" he said as we came within view of Peter. "Father's the richest millionaire in France."

"Really," I answered, merely for the sake of saying something. "I didn't know there were any."

The man glanced at me sharply.

"Still a few," he replied, after the briefest pause.

"Oh," I said, and again the conversation languished.

We had, by this time, reached the boy who, with a shout of delight, seized the bridle of his pony and began to scramble on the creature's back, obviously ready for another canter. Ann, however, held firmly to the pony's mouth.

"No, Peter," she said. "Quietly, this time. You have had quite enough excitement for one afternoon."

She turned to me for an instant before leading the pony off.

"Good-bye," she said, "and many thanks."

I stared at her, beginning to feel that very soon I should be indignant. This was really not the way to treat a fellow.

"Look here, Ann," I began, but she seemed not to notice that I had started to follow her. Or perhaps she had noticed it and perhaps that was why she chose that moment to break into a light run. She went quickly down the slope, the pony trotting beside her, with the laughing child on his back. It was a pretty picture, dead certain for the line at Burlington House.

The body servant, whoever he was, touching his cap to me, strode slowly after them, and I suddenly remembered my appointment with Shadrach. That, after all, was the business in hand, and I had come to the Isle of Wight to deal with it, and not to meet Ann Winspeare. Ann had apparently decided to be huffy and to remember ancient quarrels. That must be as it may. In the words of the poet, the head was bloody but unbowed. I would do anything for Ann. I would even crawl within limits. But this was too much.

I threw a chest and moved with dignity towards the Laurels.

The house was as unprepossessing as its owner. It would have been beastly anywhere, but in that windy corner, between the sea and the downs, it was the sort of thing that ought to be forbidden by Act of Parliament — pseudo-Elizabethan, with faked beams and bricks of exactly the wrong size, colour and shape. The grounds were full of *calceolarias*, *lobelias* and other suburban flora of the kind for which a weed killer is the only cure.

I strolled up the drive between the clipped laurel hedges and for the second time that day stood opposite the brown door. I made to ring the bell, but suddenly remembered that there were no servants in the house. I had found Shadrach alone on my previous visit, and he had told me that the servants had gone out for the afternoon. I turned the brass knob on the door, which opened at a touch, and I stood a moment in the "spacious hall thirty by twenty feet," with its stag heads, fox masks and other junk from Wardour Street.

I moved across the hall and pushed open the door of the room where I had left Shadrach an hour ago. I fancied there was a slight movement as I did so.

So Shadrach was there all right.

I entered the room. Shadrach had apparently not moved, but was still sitting where I had left him, at his large desk. The afternoon sunlight, filtering through the shuttered sun blinds behind him, made a sort of halo about his unhallowed head.

All my anger returned at the sight of him. The fellow hadn't even the decency to acknowledge my presence in any way. But I must keep my temper. With an effort I crossed the room and halted beside the desk. He still sat as at my entry, his head propped on his left hand, his right arm spread in front of him. A fountain pen was lying on the blotter.

"Mr. McGuffie," I began, but then stopped.

What was that thing in the collar of his coat? I bent forward and felt as though I had swallowed a lump of ice.

The thing that stuck out was the handle of a knife, and the blade was buried in the man's neck, high up on the right side.

I made to touch him, and the slight movement disturbed the body. It slipped sideways. The right hand, as with a living gesture, thrust towards me a white sheet of paper. I did not dare to look Shadrach in the face. My eyes dropped to the paper. The words meant nothing to me at that moment, but I read:

To the Head of the Eastern Divison,
Foreign Office, London, S. W. 1.

Sir,

The names of the Five Flamboys are . . .

CHAPTER II

I TAKE THINGS AS THEY COME

I looked from the paper to the man in the chair. He had slipped to one side and was leaning in an ungainly posture over the arm. I should feel the horror of it soon, but for the moment my mind was making strange efforts to escape. The grey tie with the diamond pin was a little out of place. I noted for the last time that Shadrach was overdressed. It seemed particularly grotesque that a dead man should be wearing a slip to his waistcoat.

But was he really dead? I bent over him, but drew quickly back. I suppose nine men out of ten confronted with a situation new to them in real life instinctively remember the things they have read. Is it perhaps true that fact follows fiction more often than fiction follows fact? I only know that, before I had laid so much as a finger on Shadrach, I remembered that one did not, in such cases, touch the body. That must be left to the experts.

There could be no doubt that the man was dead. There, in full view — I had to face it now — was the knife, sticking out of his jugular. Who would have guessed that the old man had so much blood in him? But that, again, was literature, and I must obviously do something. It was no good standing there refusing to touch anything in deference to the best authorities. And first I must telephone to the police.

I bent forward to take up the receiver but again I hesitated. I had begun to realize the position at last. Shadrach had been murdered only a moment ago. I had even heard a movement in the room as I entered. Where

was the murderer? It was essential that he should be found. Otherwise the police might jump to conclusions. I was, so far as I knew, alone in the house. I had come down to see Shadrach and I had not come as a friend. That could be proved at once from his papers. The police would want to arrest somebody if only to keep their spirits up. That was a shattering thought. I soon ceased to be sorry for Shadrach when I realised that I might quite possibly stand in the dock on his account.

I must think the matter out and lose no time about it. Every minute added to the chances of my being suspected. At that moment, however, the piece of paper upon which Shadrach had written his curious message fluttered to the floor, disturbed by a light draught from the window. I stooped to pick it up, with a vague idea that everything must be left as I had originally found it. To reach it I had to bend below the desk.

One — two — three. I must still have been a little dazed, for I remember saying to myself as I retrieved the paper from the floor that a three-legged man was not in nature. Yet there were undoubtedly three legs under the desk. Two were encased in striped trousers, white spats and patent leather shoes. The third was in cheap blue serge with a brown boot of foreign manufacture.

I had found the murderer.

I put the paper down on the blotter and looked cautiously along the edge of the desk for further signs of the man beneath it. Sure enough I got a further glimpse of him — not as reassuring as I would have wished. Just within view was one of his hands pressed on the rug to support his weight. It wore a dirty white cotton glove and had a knife in it. One knife in the throat of Shadrach and another ready for me. It would be brought swiftly up as I leaned forward to grasp the telephone, and it would enter, as I reckoned, the third intercostal space.

The brain was working at last, and not a moment too soon. Obviously the man was hoping to get away — silently and without further difficulty if he could, but, if not, after dealing with me. Should I challenge him to come forth? That, I decided, was quite unnecessarily British. I did not really see why, in this case, honour required that I should take on with my bare fists a fellow who had at least a knife and very possibly an automatic as well. I must catch him unawares.

After a moment's reflection I crossed the room, opened the door and shut it again with a sharp click. Then I slipped back on tiptoe to the desk over the thick carpet, to be ready for my man as he unsuspectingly emerged in the belief that I had departed. I reached the desk only just in time. The fellow had already crawled from beneath it and was rising to his feet as I caught up the receiver from the telephone and hit him a clip behind the ear as hard as I could. He let out a heavy grunt and fell back into the velvet curtains behind the desk. I put back the receiver and went quickly round the desk in order to secure the knife, which had fallen without a sound upon the carpet. I saw, however, that there was no need for this further precaution. I had knocked my man clean out, good and proper, and though it was not a particularly gallant action I did not in the least regret it. It seemed to me that "safety first" was the order of the day.

I squeezed behind the desk and pulled my victim out by the armpits. It was not a difficult thing to do, for he was a small thin fellow. He was wearing a shiny blue serge suit and his face was ill-shaven, with a black moustache. He was breathing heavily as I laid him on the carpet away from the desk, and, as I was tying the strings of his boot laces together and knotting his tie round his wrists, he groaned once or twice, but showed no other sign of life. And all the time old Shadrach sat there lean-

ing over the side of his chair, fixing us with his sightless eyes, as though he were taking an interest in the proceedings, while the blood dripped slowly from the desk to the carpet, and the summer flies buzzed about the curtained window.

I finished tying up my opponent when the bell rang sharply on the desk. I started nervously, and then, pulling myself together, rose from my knees and went to the telephone. It was the exchange, of course, desiring to know why I had unhooked the receiver a moment ago.

"Give me the nearest police station," I said.

Over the wire came to me the languid voice of a sweet young thing who refused to be hustled.

"Branch, please," it said.

"What do you mean?" I demanded impatiently.

I overheard something that sounded like a giggle. It was evidently not a busy day on the Freshwater exchange.

"Gentleman's lost his umbrella," suggested the sweet young thing in an aside to an invisible companion. "I'm going to give him Lost Property."

"No, you're not," I said sharply. "Give me the officer in charge and be quick about it, please. Or if there's a special branch for murder give me that."

"Coo," said the exchange.

Then there was a click and an instant later a heavy voice announced itself as Freshwater police station.

I explained as briefly as I could what had happened. I was told at once to touch nothing, to keep an eye on the murderer, and to await the arrival of the law.

All this was according to programme, and I settled down to carry out my instructions. I had not been waiting for more than five minutes when the man on the floor turned heavily over and struggled to a sitting posture on the carpet. He looked at me with resentment.

"You are the police, perhaps," he suggested. He spoke English with difficulty and with an accent that I was unable to place.

"No," I replied.

"Why you come to this place?" he went on. "You owe him money, perhaps?" he gestured with his head at the figure in the chair.

"That is my business," I responded.

"Why you quarrel with me?" he persisted. "I owe him money too. The pig is better dead. You let me loose and I say nothing. Nobody wiser. English country policeman. No brains, you understand."

I stared at the little man. He was certainly a cool customer.

"See here," I said firmly. "You don't seem quite to realise the position. You've just committed a murder. Doubtless you had your reasons, but you can't expect to get away with it, you know."

"I spare you trouble, perhaps," said the man, glancing again towards the figure in the chair.

"And don't forget that anything you say may be used in evidence against you," I continued, feeling this to be the proper formula.

"I also give evidence," he said with a cunning look in his dark eyes. "We wait here together for the police, is it not? You tell your story. I tell mine."

"It's no use," I answered. "I see your point. But it occurs to me that the police will want to arrest somebody and I would rather it were you than me."

"I think you be sorry for this," he said, with admirable detachment. "My friends not wish me to be arrested. They find it not very convenient."

I was spared the necessity of any further hardening of the heart against these rather odd persuasions by the sound of heavy footsteps in the hall, and an instant later

the door of the room was thrust open. The police had arrived.

The officer in charge, who introduced himself as Inspector Brailsford, at once asked me to give him an account of what had happened, while he examined the body with the assistance of the doctor he had brought with him. He was also, as I noted, interested in the things he found on the desk.

I told my story as briefly as possible, and the little man in the blue serge suit made no attempt to interrupt me or deny the facts.

"Caught red-handed," said the Inspector. "Wearing gloves, too," and with solemn majesty he proceeded, upon my evidence, to arrest the prisoner in due and proper form. The little man still said nothing, but stood looking at me with a far from amiable expression while they put the handcuffs on him and unlaced his boots. I was relieved to note that he was not prepared when it came to the point to challenge my account of what had happened, and that he had apparently made up his mind to accept the inevitable.

Inspector Brailsford, leaving his men in charge of the house, asked me to come with him to the station. In the drive was a police car and, as I entered it with the prisoner, another car drove up with a couple of men in plain clothes. They alighted and the Inspector, before joining me, had with them a short conversation which I was unable to catch. From the deference with which he treated them, I inferred that they were men of authority. They took no notice of me, however, but entered the house as soon as the Inspector had finished speaking.

The formalities at the station were tedious. The prisoner was searched in my presence, and from papers he carried it appeared that his name was Constantine Petrano, and that he was a Roumanian subject, employed as a waiter

in Soho. I was required to make a long and detailed statement, which was taken down in shorthand and typed. I thought it best to be quite frank with the Inspector, and I explained how I came to be visiting the Laurels that afternoon. I asked him, however, to keep my brother's name out of any proceedings which might be necessary. I told him also of my position as a member of the Secretariat of the League of Nations, and my obligation to be present at the opening of the Assembly. Would it be necessary for me to remain in England?

"I can tell you nothing for the moment," said the Inspector, when I had read and signed the statement I had made. "I do not yet know what action we shall be asked to take. Normally you would be required to give evidence at the inquest and, again, at the trial. All I can say at present, however, is that we expect you to be at our disposal when we need you. In the meantime, I will ask you on no account to discuss this affair with any one at all or to give any information whatever to the press. I understand you have yourself no desire for publicity. We shall respect your wishes in that respect, but in return we shall expect you to keep your own council, and I advise you, for the moment, to forget that visit of yours to the Laurels this afternoon. You will hear, in due course, from Scotland Yard."

My eyes widened perceptibly.

"Scotland Yard?" I echoed. "Is this a matter for them? I thought you only brought the Yard in when things were difficult, and this seems to be a pretty straightforward case."

"You appear to be taking my advice, Mr. Baxter," he replied. "I asked you to put out of your mind what happened at the Laurels, and you seem already to have forgotten an important detail. You even omitted to mention it in your statement."

Suddenly I remembered.

"The letter, you mean. Lowenstein, or McGuffie as he called himself, was writing to the Foreign Office."

"He was," said the Inspector. "Shall we leave it at that?"

The Inspector had begun to look extremely wise, and, being myself an official, I had no difficulty in realising that he was completely at a loss.

"I will be guided by you," I said. "I must again point out, however, that I am expected in Geneva on Monday morning. Am I free to go?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Baxter, but the matter is no longer in my hands. We have your address in London, and you will receive a communication within the next twenty-four hours."

Half an hour later I was on the boat crossing to Lymington on the way to London. I had thought for a moment of trying to get into touch with Ann before I left. The address of a millionaire child should not be difficult to discover. I could think, however, of no reasonable excuse for turning up again. I had, therefore, climbed into the small motor coach that carries passengers for London from Freshwater to the boat at Yarmouth, and within an hour I was in the express for Waterloo.

I got to the club in time for a late dinner, and the rest of the evening I spent in packing. I was, it seemed, to hear from Scotland Yard; but I had made up my mind, that if no orders came to the contrary, I should leave for Geneva by the eleven o'clock train in the morning.

There was no message waiting for me when I came down to breakfast, but while I was making the most of my last English dish of eggs and bacon, and looking in the *Morning Mirror* for a possible reference to the murder, I became suddenly aware that Jenkins, the club porter, was making the usual effort to clear from his

throat the permanent obstruction from which he apparently suffers.

"Hullo, Jenkins," I said. "What's the news with you?"

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "You are wanted on the telephone. Scotland Yard."

I arose in some confusion. *Wanted* had an ugly sound. But Jenkins has a genius for the wrong word.

The message was short but precise: Would I be kind enough to call as soon as convenient and ask for Inspector Thompson.

I looked at my watch. It was already nearly half-past nine, and the boat train left at a quarter past eleven. I decided to hope for the best and to take my luggage with me.

This was my first visit to Scotland Yard, and I regret to say that my romantic expectations were unfulfilled. The place was like any other business office, with an occasional policeman in the corridors to give it a touch of local colour. But why do policemen look so odd without their helmets—hardly dressed as it were? I was taken in a lift to the second or third floor. There they bestowed me in a small waiting room, adorned with pictures of police commissioners, all very mild and benignant, as though looking after criminals had somehow developed the paternal instinct to an abnormal degree. Very shortly quite a nice young man, who might some day be himself sufficiently paternal, entered the room.

"Mr. Baxter," he enquired.

I rose to my name feeling as though I had been sent for by the headmaster. If the police inspire such feelings in a perfectly respectable member of society, I begin to understand why the criminal classes spend so much of their time in avoiding them.

"Sir George Atkinson is waiting for you," said the nice young man.

"Not the High Commissioner?" I faltered.

He nodded.

"Come along," he urged. "We understand you have a train to catch."

I looked at my wrist watch. It was still just short of ten, though it seemed ages since I had entered the building. I followed my guide along the corridor, who pushed open a green baize door. Behind it was another door of sturdy oak. I then found myself in a large room, impressively furnished. The redoubtable Sir George Atkinson was seated at a big mahogany desk at the further end. Every one knows Sir George. His face is a libel on the character behind it. It is a red face, and his nose has lost the clean outlines of its youth, so that you take him at once for a three-bottle man. But it is equally notorious that he drinks nothing stronger than ginger ale, though his window, as I noted, overlooks the embankment and he thus has a fine view of the Highland figure who advertises his national beverage on the further side of the Thames.

Sir George Atkinson rose and held out his hand as I approached the desk.

"Good morning, Mr. Baxter," he said. "I am sorry to trouble you, but we will keep an eye on the clock. You shall not miss your train."

The young man who had conducted me to the presence retired. The formidable Sir George sat down and turned his luminous nose in my direction. For a moment he said nothing, which was rather terrible.

Then suddenly he smiled, and at once I knew why he was the most popular commissioner the Yard had ever had. Incidentally he came at once to the point.

"So your brother has been having trouble with the late Mr. McGuffie," he said.

"Why yes, sir," I replied.

He looked at me searchingly.

"Was that the only reason why you went down to see him yesterday?"

I nodded.

"McGuffie," I said, "was pressing my brother for payment. I went to see whether I could do anything about it."

"And then?" prompted Sir George.

"We — er — discussed the matter, and McGuffie said at last that he would give my brother another month and not a day more. I asked for time to consider his proposal. He told me to come back in an hour."

"You left him?"

"Yes."

"You noticed nothing unusual?"

"No."

"Saw nobody else?"

"No."

"And you returned in an hour to find him dead?"

"Yes."

"How did he strike you — McGuffie, I mean?"

"He wanted very much to be paid. But that isn't altogether unusual in a money lender."

"Depends. One can usually get accommodation — on sufficiently bad terms."

"Well, it did strike me, sir, that McGuffie was perhaps really in need of the money. He was not exactly nervous, but he seemed to be rather worried. I wouldn't go further than that."

"Anything odd about the room?"

"Nothing, except, of course, the furniture. That was pretty grim."

The Commissioner smiled, and for a moment after that he was silent. Suddenly, however, he got to his feet and moving round the desk began to pace slowly up and down the room. At the second turn he paused and looked at me.

"Mr. Baxter," he said abruptly, "you are an official of the League of Nations and you are returning to Geneva?"

"Yes, sir," I answered, in some surprise. The fellow seemed to know everything.

"Then in the interests of the League allow me to give you just one word of advice. Say nothing about this affair, more especially in Geneva."

I sat back in my chair. What had the murder of a money lender in the Isle of Wight got to do with the League of Nations?

"I'm not to mention the matter at all?"

The Commissioner nodded.

"But I can scarcely avoid saying something about it, sir, when I apply for leave to attend the inquest, and I suppose I shall be wanted as a witness for the Crown when Petrano comes up for trial."

"You needn't worry about that for the moment," he replied. "The inquest, I may tell you, will be postponed."

The Commissioner came forward and laid a hand on my shoulder.

"Bit of a mystery, isn't it? But you'll know more about it in time. I promise you that."

"I think I understand, sir. McGuffie was writing to the Foreign Office. The Five Flamboys, in fact."

The hand of the Commissioner was heavy on my shoulder.

"You saw that letter?" he said.

His voice was low and sharp, and my excitement rose. Inquest postponed. Not a word to anybody. And I was to hear more about it soon. Was this an affair of State?

"Yes," I said, "I saw the letter. It looks as if McGuffie had been pulled up just a moment too soon. The story stopped short just as it began to be interesting."

"To be continued," said the Commissioner.

He paused a moment and held out his hand.

"Well, Mr. Baxter. I'm glad to have met you. I wanted to be sure that we could, if necessary, rely on you. I have come to the conclusion that we may. You must go now if you intend to catch your train. I wish you a comfortable journey and pleasant company *en route*."

I shook hands with the Commissioner. He was looking at me very directly, but there was a flicker in his eye. My own feeling was one of elation. I was a person to be trusted. I felt, indeed, a little overwhelmed and began to mutter my appreciation of the manner in which I was being treated. Sir George, however, cut me short and walked with me to the door.

"One last word of advice," he said, as we stood a moment on the threshold. "During the next few days take things as they come. It's a useful habit."

"Now what exactly does he mean by that?" I wondered, as the door closed behind me and I was led away by a waiting messenger. I had no time for reflection, however. I was conducted — I was going to say hustled — into a taxi in which to my surprise a plain clothes officer accompanied me to Victoria Station. We sped down the Embankment, past the Houses of Parliament.

"We have got you a reserved seat on the train, sir," said the detective at my side, as we drew abreast of the Army and Navy Stores.

"But I had one, myself," I protested.

"There seems to have been some misunderstanding about it," said the man.

"But I bought the ticket at Cooks three days ago," I answered, dreams of high international intrigue giving way to the sordid realities of international travel.

"So I was given to understand," said the detective. "Your club, however, rang up during your interview with the Commissioner to say that Cooks had just sent round a message to the effect that a mistake had been made."

"The devil they did," I said.

"Fortunately, however, we were able to find you a place."

"That's awfully good of you," I said.

"Accidents will happen," said the man.

We arrived at the station with barely five minutes to spare. The detective found me my seat, had my luggage bestowed and departed before I could solve the agonising problem as to whether or not half a crown should change hands.

I lit a cigarette and strolled up and down the platform. McGuffie had been murdered by a Roumanian, name of Petrano. McGuffie had been writing to the Foreign Office — to the Eastern Division which deals with the Balkan countries. He had mentioned Five Flamboys, and was about to reveal who they were. But Petrano had cut the story short. "To be continued," the Commissioner had said, and I was to take things as they came. There was more in this than met the eye, and who or what on earth were the Five Flamboys anyway?

These useful meditations had gone so far, when my firm decision to follow the advice of the Commissioner and take things as they came was rather violently tested. For who should come hurrying along the platform but the one person in the world whom I have never been able to take either coming or going. In other words, I suddenly caught sight of Ann Winspeare. Beside her trotted the small boy, Peter, and in their wake followed a whole army of servants, male and female, including two incredibly smart young men in bowler hats, whom I took to be superior private detectives.

I stood bravely in her path.

"Ann," I said, "is it possible that you, too, are travelling on this train?"

"Yes, John," she answered, "but I've no time to be friendly."

Whereupon, without another word, she turned aside from me and began to help her young charge up the steps into what I then perceived to be a reserved saloon. These millionaires did themselves pretty well, I reflected bitterly as I watched these exclusive proceedings. Ann, having inducted her charge into the saloon, appeared again a moment later on the step of the carriage.

"Ann," I said firmly, "if we are to travel on the same train, a spot of lunch would seem to be indicated."

"Can't manage it, I'm afraid," she said shortly, and, without ceremony, she called briskly over my shoulder to a little black-haired man, who was staggering under a large dressing case.

"Come along, Mischa," she urged. Mischa pushed me aside, and I turned away in wrath. This was not to be borne. To be pushed in the back by a man with a name like a table water. Ann and her millionaires were really too intolerable. Let her lunch with Mischa, Vichy, Evian, Apollinaris, and the rest of them. I could think of nothing worse.

I walked along the train and entered my own compartment, which was further down in the coach. Sitting down, I lit a pipe, and to calm my shattered feelings opened and began to read the *Times*. The train started, but I did not look up from the paper. I have travelled too often from Victoria to take any special interest in farewell scenes. A leading article, more than usually dignified, on imports and exports, restored me to a sense of my own importance as the citizen of a pretty considerable Empire, and I was soon sufficiently soothed to notice that my pipe had gone out. I laid down the paper for a moment on my knee.

The compartment, I noticed, was empty, except for one other man, who was seated opposite. I looked across at

him — once and then a second time. My pipe fell to the floor.

What was it the Commissioner had said? *I was to take things as they came.* But this was too much.

I leaned forward and touched Mr. Angus McGuffie on the knee.

"Excuse me, sir," I said, "but I saw you murdered yesterday."

CHAPTER III

I TRAVEL WITH THE BODY

For a moment we stared at one another. The eyes of Shadrach, once seen, are not forgotten, and only yesterday I had looked at them rather closely hoping to observe some signs of relenting in that small matter of my brother's debt. They were hard, shifty eyes, curiously opaque, without a gleam. I looked into them now. It was quite impossible, of course, but those were the eyes of Shadrach.

Then, in a flash, they changed, no longer impervious, but crystal-clear, with a merry devil dancing in each of them. The man laid a lean hand on my knee.

"Well, Mr. Baxter," he said, "it passes muster, what? Must have given you quite a turn, as the cook would say."

"Your eyes," I muttered. "How do you manage it?"

"I just try to feel as though I ought to be kicked by every decent fellow in sight. That's the secret of an effective impersonation. You must live the part."

He stooped down, picked up my pipe and handed it to me with a smile.

"And now," he said, "I'll give you time to recover."

"Not so easy," I complained. "It's bad enough to find oneself opposite a man who was murdered twenty-four hours ago. But it's worse to realise that there can be anybody in the world who wishes to pass for Angus McGuffie."

I groped for a word suitable to describe so strange an ambition.

"It's morbid," I added.

"You knew him rather well, it seems," said the stranger.

"Well enough," I said briefly.

"And yet you were startled? The make-up is good enough for that?" He looked at me anxiously.

"It's very good indeed," I said. "There's only one thing wrong with it."

"Quick. What is it?"

"The ears would give you away. Shadrach had quite remarkable ears — almost at right angles to his head."

"Who taught you to notice things like that? Always tell a man by his ears. But I missed them for once. One up to you, young fellow."

He rose as he spoke, lifted down a huge bag with the initials A. McG. on its side from the rack above his head, opened it and presently stood up, holding a small tube in his hand.

"Ye'll excuse me, Meester Baxter," he said, "but I'll just tak' a wee keek in yon mirror."

He moved across the compartment and, leaning over the seat upon which I was sitting, peered into the mirror let into the wall. He then squeezed on to his forefinger a thin ribbon of paste from the tube and applied it to the back of each of his ears in turn. He waited a few moments, and I saw his ears beginning to stand away from his head. He examined them critically.

"Is that better?" he enquired, turning from the mirror to me.

I nodded.

"That's about right," I said, "as near as anything can be."

He put away the tube of paste in his bag and sat down.

"Well, Mr. Baxter," he said, "I'm now at your disposal. To me, the tedious task of explanation. I'll do my best to answer some of those questions that you will shortly be asking."

"It's no use my asking questions," I said. "I don't know where to begin. Besides, I feel that curiosity would be improper. The Chief Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard advised me this morning to take things as they came."

"And you're doing it rather well, I must admit," said my companion. "We intended this little surprise to be a sort of test. Passed, with honours. And now I suppose I've got to tell you the story of my life."

I sat in expectation. The Scots accent had disappeared, and, though the strange figure in front of me, in outward semblance was still the late Shadrach Lowenstein alias Angus McGuffie, I knew that this was a very different person. Now that he was no longer living the part, the clear eyes and humorous mouth gave him away as a man that I suddenly desired to know.

"My name," he said, "is Granby, called Alistair after one of my godfathers; but the old boy went broke six months before the end and I never got a penny. But a truce to these digressions. Have you noticed, my young friend, the stirring accounts in the newspapers this morning of a dreadful murder in the Isle of Wight, and of the gallant behaviour of one, John Baxter, an official of the Secretariat of the League of Nations, who caught the murderer, almost red-handed, and tied his boot laces together? That was rather a good touch, you know, the boot laces, I mean."

"I have noticed nothing," I replied. "I've seen the *Times*, the *Express* and the *Daily Mail*. Not a word."

"Ye have noticed nothing, laddie," he rejoined, laying a hand on my knee with a ponderous gesture, and looking

so exactly like the unlamented Shadrach that I found it difficult not to laugh, "because there is nothing to notice. The order has gone forth. Wheesht, as Mr. McGuffie would say."

"That must have been a bit of a job," I remarked. "Squaring the London press on the trail of a murder."

"It can be done," said the man, to whom I will henceforth give the name of Granby. "In this case it needed a firm request signed by no less a person than the Foreign Secretary and endorsed by the Prime Minister. And thus it comes about that you, I, Sir George Atkinson, half a dozen police, and a brace of Cabinet Ministers are the only persons who know that Shadrach Lowenstein is no more. Have you got that firmly fixed in the mind?"

"I realise one thing, at any rate," I said slowly. "This meeting of ours is not a mere coincidence."

Granby smiled.

"The brain is working," he said. "It perceives an order in the scheme of things. This is not, as you observe, a coincidence. The long arm is resting. You have no strawberry mark under the left elbow. Neither have I. All this is according to programme. I took the liberty of arranging that you should occupy the seat in which you are at present sitting even at the risk of shaking your young faith in Thomas Cook."

He rose as he spoke, moved to the door of the compartment, slid it open and looked out into the corridor. For a moment I had an excellent back view of Angus McGuffie in striped trousers and morning coat, and I noted that the face which turned to look into the corridor was canny, suspicious and uninviting. The door then shut with a click and Granby was himself again.

"No one about," he said, in explanation of his procedure. "All *bona fide* travellers who will spend the next

hour counting the luggage and hoping to prove themselves gallant sons of Neptune with a channel crossing fair to moderate. I am now going to talk to you for a moment and I want you to take it in. Is the grey matter sufficiently retentive? Do you think you will be able to give a coherent account of what I am going to tell you, in ten minutes' time?"

"That," I said modestly, "is my profession. I am paid to remember what people say."

"Very well," said Granby. "I am, as you observe, impersonating Angus McGuffie, alias Shadrach Lowenstein, who was murdered yesterday in the Isle of Wight."

"I sha'n't forget that," I assured him.

"Perhaps I should also tell you that I am a member of the Intelligence Service of the Foreign Office and working for the moment under instructions from Scotland Yard. That is for your private ear. The word 'private' is in italics and underlined in red ink."

"I understand. But why impersonate Angus McGuffie?"

"What would you say was the best way to find out all there is to know about a man?"

"That's not for me to say. I'm only an amateur. You're a professional."

"The best way, laddie, is to step into his shoes. Take up the thread. Be the man himself."

"But why Angus?"

"Angus, my boy, is not so simple as he looks."

"I never thought he was."

"Angus was deep. Full fathom five. Behold me diving into Angus. Angus, moreover, when he died had an appointment. He cannot keep it now. But it was an appointment at which I mean to be present."

"I see. You are going to keep it in his place."

"Capital. Explaining things to you is a pleasure. But now the story begins to be difficult. Is the wet towel in

position? Good. Angus when he died was writing to the Foreign Office."

"The names of the Five Flamboys are . . ." I murmured.

"Exactly. That's just what we want to know. And we haven't a notion. Fortunately for us, however, Angus was recently invited to meet them, and he has just been reminded of that appointment by telegram. But Angus had a previous engagement."

The rather grim mouth closed upon the familiar phrase like a mousetrap.

"You mean," I faltered, "that when the telegram came Angus was dead."

"That's just what I do mean. The telegram came late last night, and a second one this morning. Angus was being entertained, very warmly entertained I should say, elsewhere. He had been dead for several hours."

"And you are going to keep his appointment?"

"I am."

"That's all very well," I protested. "But you haven't really explained anything yet."

"Fellow feeling, laddie. I temper the wind. And we're not really doing so badly. I've explained why I am wearing these awful trousers. I suppose you now want to know what is behind it all."

He paused for a moment. We were running now through the little hills of Kent, and the hop alleys were turning smoothly past the window like the green spokes of a gigantic wheel. But I had eyes only for the man who sat opposite me in his over-tailored clothes, a travesty that accorded so ill with those flashing blue eyes and the nimble tongue.

"It begins with a well," he said abruptly.

"Truth lived at the bottom of a well," I helpfully observed. "I've often wondered why?"

"This is an oil well," continued Granby, "somewhere in Roumania. Angus knew all about it, and apparently nobody else did. How he got his information, complete with plans, estimated output, quality of the oil and so forth is one of many mysteries. Suffice it that he had this well, so to speak, in his pocket. About a month ago he was offering to hand it over to the present Roumanian Government."

"I don't understand. The well could not possibly have belonged to him. So how could he offer to dispose of it?"

"I've told you that Angus alone knew where it was. A well's not much use to you if you don't know where to find it and have no idea what it may be worth. Angus knew and he was ready to part with the information for a consideration to the Roumanian Legation in London. He at once became the most popular man in Bucharest. The Roumanian Government is broke. It is trying to float a loan, but it has no unpledged securities to offer. The well was a godsend and Angus was an angel. Terms were arranged, and Angus was about to deliver the plans and estimates, when suddenly he drew back, asked for time to consider the matter further, and finally disappeared. The Roumanians were in a pretty pickle. They wanted that loan in a hurry, but, just as they were hoping to pour oil on the financial waters, the well went west. No sign of Angus any more. So, being properly up against it, they came to us."

"Us?"

"Secret Service. Most amphibious. One foot in the Foreign Office and the other in Scotland Yard. And always very private and confidential. We were sympathetic and soothing. Hard lines to have a well dangled before your eyes and then have it swept away. Lump in the throat. Metaphors terribly mixed. All that sort of thing. Then, just as I was patting the child on the back and

saying 'there! there!' Angus turned up again looking extremely worried. He was ready, it seemed, to abide by his bargain. He warned us, however, that the matter was less simple than it appeared. Other people, he said, were after his precious well, wicked and dangerous people."

"The Five Flamboys," I interrupted.

Granby nodded.

"Angus told the Roumanian Legation that, if he sold them the well, they must protect him from the Flamboys. He would, if matters were arranged, explain why it was necessary and how it could be done. The Roumanian Legation agreed, and Angus handed over his papers about the well on terms which, if the estimates are anywhere near the truth, would have enabled him to understudy John D. Rockefeller for the rest of his life. The next day he sat down to write that letter to the Foreign Office. The Five Flamboys are . . ."

"But why the Foreign Office?"

"That was my doing. Angus, when he talked about these Flamboys to the Roumanian Minister in London, was full of dark hints about revolution. Red ruin and the breaking up of laws and all that sort of thing. He wanted protection from the Flamboys and he said he knew enough about them to get them excluded, if necessary, from every decent country in Europe. When the Roumanian Minister told me that, I pricked up my ears. It's my job at present to be interested in revolutions. So I advised the Foreign Office to get in touch with Angus in its own devious way. Contact was established. I saw Angus, who promised to communicate his information to us as soon as he had concluded his bargain with the Roumanian Minister. Incidentally, he wanted a bit extra for the names."

"Angus would."

"Angus did. Terms were again arranged, and we

waited for the information we had bought. Yesterday he sat down to deliver the goods. You know what happened next."

Granby paused.

"You may now cross-examine the witness," he said.

"Why should you be interested in revolutions?" I began.

He looked at me a moment before answering.

"Ever heard of a thing called Bolshevism?" he said at last.

"Some sort of disease, isn't it?" I asked.

"Epidemic in character," said Granby. "It nearly got into Italy some years ago, but they called in Dr. Mussolini. There was also an outbreak in Hungary. There have been one or two cases in our own country, but the British form is benignant."

"What has Bolshevism got to do with the Flamboys?" I asked.

"Perhaps nothing. Perhaps everything. We have no information at all about the Flamboys. But we do know that two corps of the Russian Red Army are secretly mobilising on the frontiers of Bessarabia, and we are, therefore, distrustful of anything that points to revolution in that part of the world. Anything else?"

"Angus was afraid of the Flamboys. He was arranging to give them away. It looks to me as though he himself had been one of them and was playing them false."

"Well, what of it?"

"It was probably an agent of the Flamboys that murdered him."

"Proceed."

"You are going to meet his murderers."

"Precisely."

"They may do it again."

"Doubtless. All that you say is true. Angus was almost

certainly murdered by an agent of the Flamboys. Petrano, who murdered him, was, in fact, quite explicit on that subject. He wouldn't say a word to us, but he talked to himself quite a lot. The little man is a wonderful linguist, and whenever he seemed to be saying something different we sent for half a dozen interpreters. The result, however, was always the same. He was merely saying again that Angus was no gentleman. Behold the head of a ruler and so forth. When he got tired of saying it in High Russian he said it in Low Syrian and Middle Greek. Angus was, as you surmise, slain in the interests of the Flamboys with whom he had been in some way connected. But the Flamboys, on the other hand, don't know anything about it. They don't know Angus is dead, or they wouldn't have sent him a telegram this morning asking him to meet them. One doesn't invite a dead man to keep an appointment."

"There was the case of Don Juan and the *commendatore*," I pointed out.

Granby smiled.

"The brow, I perceive, is higher than I thought. Enter statue, complete with marble jaws. Music by Mozart. But it doesn't fit, laddie. The Flamboys don't know Angus is dead, and what's more, they don't even know that he had handed over the well to the Roumanian Government."

With dramatic suddenness Granby pulled a paper from his breast pocket and thrust it into my hands.

I examined it curiously. It was typed in violet ink, on a single sheet of note paper, and it read as follows:

You know we wanted to have what is not and won't yet be ready received by about the 20th. Henry plans to leave. We cannot possibly do without him not you will understand because of this unfortunate unforeseen delay,

but because you know he will try to report too late to suit either us or you. At any rate Geneva must surely not be forgotten. Later and better than that date September 5th is indicated. And we know you most certainly will try to be discreet. Henry required us urgently to endeavour to give away everything. A guarded not full but fair explanation of what a powerful steady car can and will perform is meet and just. You will find at the asylum Vallorbe the facts on which rests the explanation. Both morning and evening of this week the promise of appointment holds good.

I read it a second time.

"It looks like a page from the Red King's diary in 'Alice Through the Looking Glass,'" I said. "It might almost mean something if one tried very hard."

"Read every third word," suggested Granby.

I looked at it again and deciphered it as follows:

We have not yet received the plans. We do not understand this delay. You will report to us at Geneva not later than September 5th, and you will be required to give a full explanation. A car will meet you at Vallorbe on the morning of the appointment.

There was no signature, but at the bottom of the sheet was a little diagram or picture of five clenched fists in a circle, each holding a flaming torch of conventional pattern.

I handed the paper back to Granby.

"You see," said Granby. "The Flamboys smell a rat. But they know nothing."

"This letter is a week old," I pointed out.

"But I've told you already that the invitation was received this morning by telegram."

I was silent for a moment.

"Why Flamboys?" I said at last.

"Because we don't happen to be dealing with poor

ignorant criminals. One of them is a reader of plays. Enter first and second soldier bearing flamboys. They called them flamboys, if you remember, in the days of good Queen Bess — a corruption of the French *flambeau*. Torches they were, symbols of progress."

I looked again at the letter of invitation.

"Suppose the Flamboys have since heard that Angus has been murdered."

"In that case I shall have to be unusually bright."

"Petrano may not have been acting alone."

"He was not. His papers show there was another fellow, name of Solomon Wertheim, of whom he seemed uncommonly distrustful. Solomon, however, is one of those shy fellows. No trace of him anywhere to be found."

"You're taking a pretty considerable risk."

"Agreed."

"And you'll be asked — what does it say — 'to give a full explanation.'"

"The ice will be pretty thin, but I shall get away with it somehow and keep the conversation going till I find out who the Flamboys are, and what they are doing. Then I shall slip quietly off to the post office. There is one thing in my favour. Angus never met the Flamboys face to face. At least he told me so. He always acted through agents."

I was doing my best. I had tried to live up to the advice of the High Commissioner and take things as they came. But my wits were beginning to turn a little under the strain. Pictures formed themselves in my brain. A dirty, grey land, with slag heaps, surmounted by walls and smoking chimneys. That was how I pictured an oil well. I had never seen one, but it somehow suggested the coal fields of South Wales. Then there was something else — a dead man, his face distorted, a knife protruding from his neck, and blood dripping upon a mahogany table.

I had seen that all right. Next came a sweeter vision — my brother out in Egypt, freed from his embarrassments, galloping across the polo ground, waving a stick, or a mallet, or whatever they call it (I don't play polo). Then, with a little quiver of anticipation, I remembered that I, John Baxter, was somehow to be mixed up in this amazing business. The Commissioner had implied it. The man opposite had said it.

"One thing more," I observed, outwardly cheerful but inwardly not without misgiving. "Where exactly do I come into this business?"

"First of all," said Granby, "you must forget that Angus is no more."

"I can promise you that," I said.

"Secondly," continued Granby. "You live in Geneva."

"Alas!" I said.

"The Assembly and Council of the League are meeting in Geneva to-morrow. Radulara, the Prime Minister of Roumania, will be there."

"Alas!" I said again. "He wears half a dozen overcoats and won't allow us to have a window open."

"Radulara is, nevertheless, a fine fellow. His personal habits may be peculiar, but he is the mainstay and prop of his country. Exit Radulara, exit Roumania. Radulara is going to receive the plans of the well. They are being sent to him to-day in the Foreign Office bag. The Roumanian Legation thought it safer to send them in our bag than in their own. Radulara will also receive by the same bag a letter from the Foreign Office telling him of what has happened in Freshwater and informing him that Colonel Granby is interested in the Flamboys and proposes to meet them in the person of Angus McGuffie, alias Shadrach Lowenstein. It may be difficult, perhaps impossible, for me to communicate with Radulara in Geneva. Angus must be above suspicion. He mustn't be

seen by any hireling of the Flamboys within a hundred yards of the Roumanian Delegation."

"I see. You want to use me as a kind of postman between yourself and Radulara."

"Yes," said Granby. "That's exactly what I do mean. As soon as I begin to discover who the Flamboys are and what they are doing I must be able to communicate quickly and easily with Radulara. You and I will then take a drink together in some harmless, necessary bar."

"Optimist," I said.

"You will then take the news to Radulara and bring me back any message he may wish to send. The advantage of this arrangement is that you, as a member of the Secretariat, have access to members of the Council at any time of the day or night, and that you are above suspicion. And now for the final question. Are you game, young fellow? Do the faculties spring to attention?"

"I am to keep in touch with you in Geneva and pass on any messages you may have for Radulara. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"It isn't much."

"What more do you want? Would'st drink up Eisel, eat a crocodile? Don't be so easily discouraged. One never knows. We may all have our throats cut before we are through with this business."

"But where shall I find you in Geneva?"

"I'll communicate with you from the Pension de la Reine. Do you know it?"

"On the Quai du Mont Blanc," I answered. "I lived in it for two years."

"Food?"

"Don't mention it," I replied.

Granby's face clouded. Not long ago he mentioned a

harmless, necessary bar. Now he was asking after food. It seemed time to undeceive him.

"Did you," I asked, "happen to be personally acquainted with the late Angus McGuffie?"

"I was coming to that," said Granby. "You may possibly be able to give me one or two useful hints. I met him only once during his dealings with the Foreign Office. A little light on his personal habits would be welcome."

"Necessary, perhaps," I said grimly, "but scarcely welcome. Angus McGuffie's tastes were mainly negative."

"Quick. Tell me the worst," Granby urged. He was feeling for his pipe and his pouch was open on his knee.

"Angus didn't smoke," I said. "Put it away."

Granby looked sorrowfully at his pipe, pulled himself together, and threw pipe and pouch out of the window.

Clearly this was a hero.

"What else didn't Angus do?" he asked.

"He did not drink," I observed.

"Never?"

"Not in the real sense of the word."

"Sort of camel, you mean. Anything else?"

"You mentioned food a moment ago. Angus did not eat."

"Come, he must now and then have had a stab at a chop or something."

"No. His diet was what the medical books describe as farinaceous. He never dallied with a chop or sported with a cutlet. He never touched a card, or backed a horse, or swore as a man swears," I went on. "And he never looked at a woman."

"Good God," said Granby. "What on earth did he do with his spare time?" He shook his head disconsolately.

"Why do you tell me these things?" he complained.

"You began by explaining to me the secret of a suc-

cessful impersonation," I reminded him. "You said it was essential to live the part. So now you know."

"Sure there's nothing you've forgotten?" said Granby. "I mean he didn't pick his teeth with a tram ticket or put pebbles in his shoes or wear a tummy band of ignoble flannel?"

Time had passed quickly in our compartment. I was prepared to enlarge further upon the peculiarities of Angus McGuffie, but at that moment we became aware that the train was slowing down. I caught a terrifying glimpse of grey seas and of the familiar approaches to Dover.

Granby rose to his feet.

"Tell me no more," he said, as he lifted his enormous suitcase from the rack. "Give me a little time. I have had as much as I can stand for the moment."

The door slid open and a porter put his head into the compartment.

"Anything for the boat, gentlemen?" he asked.

Angus McGuffie eyed the man suspiciously, and then said as though it hurt him: "Ye can tak' yon wee bag for fourpence."

"Gawd," said the porter, hastily offering to withdraw.

"One moment," I said. "Take this as well." I pointed to my own small valise and carefully shut one eye.

The porter collected the cases and gave me a brass check bearing the figures 531.

"And mind ye," said Angus McGuffie, as we moved slowly down the corridor in the wake of our luggage, "I've got your number, laddie, and I'm expecting to meet ye on the upper deck."

We traversed the platform in silence and passed the officials controlling passports. Side by side we moved to the gangway and climbed aboard. On the deck we stood a moment, watching the passengers as they came, while

Angus, with an anxious, hunted expression, looked everywhere for Number 531.

"One moment, Granby," I began.

Angus McGuffie looked me up and down with an expression of bewilderment.

"I'll trouble ye, young man, not to miscall a McGuffie o' the McGuffies."

"I'm sorry, Mr. McGuffie," I said in swift apology, "but for the moment I failed to recognise you."

"And what's to hinder ye from recognising an auld acquaintance I should like to know?" he observed.

"The McGuffie I knew had a weakness," I remarked.

Granby's face brightened considerably. Good actor though he was he could not help it.

"A weakness, did you say? Give it a name and I'll order one at once, whatever it may be."

"Chewing gum," I said. "He was never without it."

Granby was silent. I knew what he wanted to say. But Angus never swore as a man swears.

CHAPTER IV

I AM LESS THAN THE DUST

Shortly after leaving harbour I lost sight of Granby. I had gone to the steward's office to get some French money, and on returning to our chairs on the main deck I found only his luggage. I accordingly made my way to the bar.

First, I needed a drink, and secondly I wanted to see whether Ann Winspeare was lunching in the saloon next door. For I had made up my mind very firmly about Ann. She might snub me as often as she pleased, but I should henceforth decline to notice it. This cat-and-dog business was ridiculous, and I was resolute to end it.

Thoughts of Ann alternated rapidly, as I threaded my way through the passengers, with thoughts of my new acquaintance, and the curious position in which I now stood as an accessory to his fantastic impersonation. In the train, with Granby sitting opposite me, the enterprise had seemed acceptable, even amusing; but in remembrance it took on a different aspect. This could be no laughing matter for Granby. His story with its glimpses of high finance and possible revolution went round and about in my head. Granby was putting his head into a pretty nest of hornets by the look of things. Odd how soon I had taken to him, and how easily he had caught me up into his crazy schemes. Odd, too, how vividly the real man had shown through his disguise. I had a sudden memory of him swinging his heavy suitcase from the rack. He must be made of steel. His vitality, too.

I tried to picture him in decent clothes and free to behave as he pleased. But that was a pleasure in store. For the moment he was Angus McGuffie, and henceforth would have to be on his best behaviour. There would, I felt sure, be no lapses from the straight and narrow way.

I made to enter the bar, but paused upon the threshold. For there stood the subject of my meditations in confabulation with the barman. This would never do. I took a step forward.

"Granby," I began.

A dull suspicious eye was turned in my direction, and I realised my error. This was not my friend Granby. But what was Angus doing in the bar?

I turned aside and ordered a double brandy and soda, admiring, as I did so, the look of sour disgust upon the face of my companion. I secured the brandy and stood aside to make room for others who needed a similar support. It was then, just as I was sipping my drink that I heard a voice disagreeably expostulating in the most execrable French.

"Five francs for a piece of chewing gum," it said. "*Très bien. Pour la monnaie je la payerai, mais marquez mes mots — j'écrirai au Times.*"

Alas! my poor friend. I saw him leave the bar, the packet of chewing gum in his right hand, and on his face was such an expression as Lot must have worn when leaving the cities of the plain.

According to plan I next paid a visit to the saloon, but there was no trace of Ann to be found. Nor was I able to discover her anywhere on deck. We were more than halfway across the channel when I caught sight of her, looking out for a moment, from one of the private cabins. I might have guessed it, of course. Millionaires can afford that sort of thing. Why hadn't they hired the whole boat?

Granby, meanwhile, was living the part. He sat throughout the voyage huddled in his greatcoat, though the day was warm enough, and looked so uninviting that I thought it best to avoid his company. I accordingly paced the deck, watching the wheeling gulls, and wondering, at intervals, whether the events in which I had become involved could ever possibly have a sequel. These Flamboys were too good to be true. People didn't behave like that in the twentieth century, with their code messages, secret signs and all the rest of it. I tried in vain to picture them—muscular, hairy of chest, stripped to the waist and waving five great torches? The jaded imagination refused to work. More probably they would not look at all unusual, just the ordinary sort of city man, with a few wisps of hair between the five of them, gold teeth and ample tummies spanned by gilded watch chains, from which would hang a little gold torch for a mascot. Meanwhile, they had murdered Shadrach and Granby was going to meet them.

The boat which had been drawing into Calais for the last ten minutes came up against the quay with a soft thud, and I went to collect my luggage. Granby had disappeared, and I did not see him in the customs house. My attention there was caught by a man just in front of me. I could not help noticing him because no one had any right to be so well-dressed. Also he was extremely angry, and an angry man at issue with the customs is always bound to attract one's attention, and in most cases one's sympathy. The customs officer insisted on opening his suitcase, which in the owner's opinion was quite unnecessary, as he was not, he explained, remaining in France, but going through direct to Switzerland. He was, therefore, it seemed, making the same journey as myself.

The man attracted me, though he was everything that nature's Englishman was normally careful to avoid. He

wore a soft collar and a tie which in another moment might begin to flow. With infinite discretion it avoided being conventional without being absolutely Byronic. His clothes were cut by a good English tailor, and he wore them well—with more than a suggestion that he was aware of the fact. His light Vandyke beard suggested the Frenchman—not the modern Frenchman but the Frenchman of the day when to shave the face was socially disgraceful. But though his appearance was French, his accent was, deliberately as it seemed, as English as his fluency and the natural vivacity of his manner permitted. He was a man who obviously refused to herd himself with the men of any time or race. One suspected him at sight of refusing to read anything later than the satires of Dryden and of collecting rare editions of Ronsard. He moved, in the dingy precincts of the customs house, with a slight swagger, as though he had the place to himself, and as though the crowd had nothing to do but make way for him as he came, with the result that when he moved his suitcase he swung it from the counter with so free a gesture that it caught me sharply on the knee. It was partly my own fault for I had become unduly absorbed in watching him and he looked at me for a moment as though my knee had no business to be there. Thus might Cyrano have regarded a man whom he had surprised in too obvious a contemplation of his nose. His apologies, however, were immediate, and very handsome, for he suggested, with an elaborate elegance in keeping with his slightly romantic appearance, that my physical distress—for he had caught me on a sensitive spot—and his own lively regret that he should have been the cause of it should at once be forgotten in a friendly glass at the bar of the Hotel Terminus.

I begged, however, to be excused, with a vague notion, as I did so, that I had seen the man before. I then made

my way to the Paris express where I found Granby already installed in my compartment. His jaw was moving silently, and on his face was the expression of a man for whom life, apart from the delights of a continuous mastication, had few pleasures. It was obvious that friendly conversation in a railway carriage was not one of them.

It was just at that moment that I again saw Ann Winspeare. She was climbing with Peter into the train. I inferred that she was making for a reserved compartment which I had noted in passing down the corridor, and in accordance with the policy I had resolutely laid down for myself I hastened to intercept her.

"Ann," I said, as we met in the corridor, "is there anything I can do for you? Won't you stretch a point perhaps and lunch with the common herd? First service in ten minutes."

She looked at me hesitatingly, looking rather worried, I thought, and holding her charge by the hand.

"I know you," said the boy with a sudden smile. He turned to Ann and added brightly: "He's the nice man we met in the English island."

Bless the child. I apparently needed a testimonial and here it was. Even Ann was obliged to smile upon me after that.

"I may be able to manage it, John," she said.

At that moment, however, the two dapper young men, wearing bowler hats, who had something to do with the complicated escort that attended her and Peter, appeared in the corridor and, without another word, she turned to meet them, while at the same time I found myself pushed on one side by Mischa, carrying an enormous number of shiny leather suitcases. He followed Ann and the child and the two young men in bowler hats down the corridor at

a respectful distance. Heartily cursing these encumbrances, I turned and went back to my compartment.

I found Granby looking out of the window. On his face was an expression which no one I felt sure had ever seen on Shadrach. He was smiling and his eyes were shining.

He turned to me with enthusiasm.

"By George, Baxter," he said. "How's that for a damsel in distress?"

I followed his gaze and saw that Ann had descended from the train and was involved in a flushed altercation with a railway official. Her voice, raised in expostulation, came to us faintly. It looked as though she were having trouble with some registered luggage.

My companion had risen from his seat and was making for the door. This was new light on Granby. I caught him by the arm.

"You forget," I said grimly, "Angus McGuffie was not that sort of man. The lady leaves you cold."

Granby turned from the door with a sigh.

"Cauld," he repeated. "She leaves me cauld. I must remember that."

"Besides," I went on, "I happen to know her."

"The devil you do," said Granby. "Good hunting. Who is she, anyway?"

"Name of Ann Winspeare," I answered shortly.

He did not change countenance by so much as the flicker of an eyelid, but I felt that the name was not unknown to him. We watched her from the window. The incident was apparently closed, and she climbed once more into the coach.

"So that's Ann Winspeare," said Granby softly.

"You know her?" I said dubiously.

"Know her," he repeated. "Do you think I could pos-

sibly have any doubt on the subject if I did? I know the name," he added, I thought rather inconsequently.

"I'm probably lunching with her," I said loftily.

He looked at me sharply.

"Indeed," he said, "then you'd better be careful."

"What do you mean?" I asked indignantly.

He took no notice of my resentment, but continued as though to himself, "Why is she travelling to-day, I wonder?"

I looked at him in astonishment.

"She's in charge of a small boy," I said. "There are also two young men in bowler hats, and a man covered with suitcases."

Granby nodded.

"It's a week too soon," he muttered.

Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added, "You're lunching with her, did you say?"

"I am."

"Then I'll give you a word of advice. Miss Winspeare is doing a job of work, and it's a whole-time job, let me tell you. Don't distract her attention, laddie."

"Not much chance of that," I said a little bitterly.

"Do you know her well?"

"Pretty well," I admitted.

"Then let me tell you something. This is no time for silken dalliance. Miss Winspeare will need to keep the wits all bright and shining."

"You seem to know more about it than I do," I fretfully observed.

"I know something about her present job, if that's what you mean," said Granby. "And if you *do* happen to be lunching with her by any chance, tell her to be extra careful of her charge."

"Is that a message?" I asked.

"As you please. She may take it better from you."

I had my doubts on that point. Ann had so far shown very little disposition to take advice from me, good, bad or indifferent. Why should Granby be so promptly interested? For the next quarter of an hour I did my best to discover the reason, but Granby remained mysterious. He did not know the girl, but he knew all about the young millionaire for whom she was responsible. That was all I could get out of him.

"This is *her* funeral," he said, with a brutality which I felt to be more in keeping with Angus than with his genial self. "I've got quite enough on my hands without interfering with other people's business. The lad is well guarded by men who know their job."

I tried again, but he would say no more, following that irritating habit of Secret Service men who always stop just as the tale begins to move.

There came a thin tinkle from the corridor, and the luncheon-car attendant appeared at the door, bill in hand.

"*Déjeuner, premier service,*" he announced.

"Well," I said, getting to my feet, "I'm sorry to leave you, Angus, but your dislike of the opposite sex is so notorious that I would not venture to suggest making it a threesome. Besides, they don't serve arrowroot or sago pudding on this train. Much better stay where you are. It would only distress you to hear the corks popping."

Angus looked at me sourly.

"It pleases ye to be facetious, but I'll akse ye to remember what happened to the bairns that mockit Elisha."

Whereupon he thrust a hand into his waistcoat pocket, extracted a piece of chewing gum from its wrapping and placed it between his teeth with every appearance of enjoyment.

I walked into the corridor and hastened towards the luncheon car. Should I, or should I not, find Ann awaiting

me? She had seemed very doubtful; and, in spite of my assurance when speaking to Granby, it was with little hope that I groped my way along the narrow passage, sprinkling the air with "pardons" as I pushed past the type of tourist who, having reserved a seat for himself, allows his baggage to occupy it while he fills the corridor outside.

Passing the compartment which had been reserved for Peter, I caught a glimpse of him sitting in the far corner by the window. He did not see me, but was reading a picture book. Between him and the door were the two men in bowler hats, and opposite him was Mischa.

I reached the luncheon car at last and there, standing by the door, was Ann. Her cheeks were flushed, and there was a look on her face as of one who anticipated a friend.

"I've been kept waiting," she said.

"Sorry," I answered, too happy to feel dashed by the reproof. "I came as quickly as I could, but the corridor is full of the world's biggest tourists."

"But I wasn't waiting for you," she observed, "not as it happens."

"Then it happens very badly," I said. "Who is he?"

But Ann was looking down the car.

"There's only one table left," she pointed out. "So I'm afraid you'll have to lunch with us."

"Thanks for the welcome, Ann," I replied.

I took her by the arm and pushed her firmly forward to the vacant places.

"I oughtn't to be here at all," she said as we sat down.

"Then you'd better let me order you an *apéritif*. Very soothing to the conscience."

I beckoned to the waiter, who was holding a complicated assortment of bottles in an extremely unprofessional manner by the neck.

"Well," I said, as he poured out the vermouth, "how's

Peter? And why isn't he having lunch? I have taken quite a fancy to Peter."

"Peter is all right," said Ann shortly.

I looked at her in surprise. Ann and I had often quarrelled, but she had never been one to snap. She usually had more subtle ways of showing her displeasure. But I was determined not to lose my temper.

"Poor Peter," I said softly.

Ann looked at me dangerously over the Russian salad.

"What I mean is," I hastened to explain, "the child seems to have no private life. When he falls off his pony a footman suddenly blooms in the wilderness, and when he goes on a journey he has an escort that would break the spirit of any ordinary lad."

"Thank you, John," said Ann.

"I was not referring to his governess," I manfully persisted. "Present company —"

"Has no wish to be excepted," concluded Ann. "Besides," she added abruptly, "what do you know of Peter?"

"Nothing at all. I only know that when I was a boy I should have been sorry to think that there was some one watching me at every turn. It would have cramped my style."

"Well, in any case, it's no business of yours," she said.

I was beginning to feel sorry for Ann. This was almost the first time I had seen her reduced to being merely rude. At the same time I was nettled. Admitted I was less than the dust. But give a chap a chance. I must show her that I was not such a stranger to her affairs as she imagined.

"I'm sorry you take it like that, Ann," I said gravely. "My intentions are excellent."

"Hell —" she began.

"Yes," I said. "I know that one. I also know that Scotland Yard is very seriously interested in Peter. I

have, in fact, a sort of message for you, quite informal, of course, but it's straight from the stable. 'Miss Wainspeare will need to keep the wits all bright and shining.' Those were his very words."

I had at any rate succeeded in my purpose. Ann was looking at me now with undoubted interest. I was no longer merely a fly on the wheel.

"It needs no ghost from the grave to tell me that," she said. "Who gave you this message?"

"It was not exactly a message," I began.

"Don't hedge," she interposed severely.

"I'm not hedging," I retorted brilliantly. "The man who gave that message—or shall we say the man who made that observation?—is travelling on the train. He is a friend of mine, and he knows the Yard from cellar to garret."

Ann looked at me carefully for a moment.

"What is he like?" she asked. "And why is he going to Paris?"

"He is a very good fellow, and he is going to Paris—well, why do chaps go to Paris?"

"Mother would never tell me," said Ann.

"He is going to Paris to enjoy himself," I said.

"What is his name?"

The conversation was beginning to go rather too fast. I must not give Granby away.

"Smith," I answered resourcefully.

"You travelled with him to Dover?"

"I did."

"And at Dover you came on board together."

"That is so."

"And his name is Smith?"

I nodded.

"You are sure?"

"Of course I am."

"Why is it Smith?" she asked. "I mean," she continued, "can't you think of a better one?"

I saw that her face had lost the rather startled look with which she had received my message. I had interested her for a moment, but now she was no longer impressed.

"Smith," I repeated without conviction.

"Please don't say it again. And next time they ask you, say Angus McGuffie, of the Laurels, Freshwater, Isle of Wight. You may add that he is a money lender, and, if you really wish to be believed, you must not suggest that he is going to Paris to enjoy himself."

I thought I had forgotten how to blush, but now I could only hope that Ann would put it down to the food and wine.

"Ann," I began, "you are mistaken."

"Mr. McGuffie at Freshwater was our neighbour. I should know him anywhere," said Ann. "He's a horrid little man."

"Let me explain," I continued eagerly. Then suddenly I stopped. She noted my crimson face, and I knew her in that moment for a woman without pity. She simply waited.

"Well?" she prompted.

But there was nothing I could say. I could not give away Granby's impersonation. I had blundered into the barbed wire.

"Some other time," I suggested.

My defeat was so crushing and so frankly owned that the heart of Ann was softened.

"Never mind, John," she said kindly, "you meant it well. You thought, perhaps, that I needed help. We women should never face the world alone, should we, John? I must admit you started well. That bit about Scotland Yard and the message—you very nearly had me there. Better luck next time, but try in future to be less theatrical and more convincing. The staff work was pretty poor."

Was this divine pity? Or was she merely rubbing it in? I left the problem for consideration at a more convenient moment, for just then I became aware that a man was standing at my elbow and that Ann was addressing him.

"You're very late, Mr. Wyndham," she said. "You've missed the Russian salad. Do you know each other, by the way? Mr. Baxter — Mr. Wyndham."

It was the man with the Vandyke beard. Undoubtedly he was well-dressed. Moreover, he was ten minutes late and Ann did not seem to resent it. I looked at Ann without enthusiasm as he took the vacant place in front of me.

He smiled at me pleasantly. He had excellent teeth.

"We have met before, Mr. Baxter."

"In the customs," I said shortly.

"No," he said. "It was more congenial than that."

I looked at him carefully. I had never seen that beard before this morning. But beards may come and beards may go; the face goes on forever. I remembered it now. I had seen him at the fatal ball, where Ann and I had so disastrously quarrelled. He had caught her on the bounce — claimed the dance that was really mine and driven me to seek consolation with the Widow Clicquot.

"Don't you remember?" he persisted. "It was at Lady Clandoy's ball last season in Berkeley Square."

"I was certainly there," I said indifferently, "but there were so many of us on that occasion. Lady Clandoy had cast her net rather wide."

"Yes," he said pleasantly. "And very fortunately it included us both."

I realised that in my present temper I was unlikely to get the better of my polite antagonist. He was picturesque, but by no means a fool, and that faint swagger was no mere affectation. This was not a carpet knight, but one who would obviously, if occasion offered, give as good as

he got. His restless eyes, black under the arched Elizabethan eyebrows, rested on me with a humorous challenge and I felt that he remembered every detail of our first encounter, of which he had so unseasonably reminded me. Certainly he had the devil's own luck. He could scarcely have chosen a better moment for his appearance. Ann inquired with an interest unnecessarily cordial what was taking him to Paris.

"Is it work, health or pleasure?" she asked.

"Work," he said. "There was no pleasure in the programme. That has come by sheer good fortune."

He smiled and bent upon her a look which equity just forbids me to describe as languishing. Ann smiled. I think I have already said the man was well-dressed. I will only add that if I had ever looked at Ann like that myself she would have boxed my ears.

The lunch was interminable. Wyndham was going beyond Paris to Lausanne. He was, it seemed, interested in a school somewhere in Switzerland for which he was, I gathered, partly responsible financially. Ann confessed to the same destination, which contrasted unpleasantly with the reticence which she had maintained in discussing her affairs with me. Wyndham exclaimed at the coincidence and was persistently gallant. He gave me no obvious cause to resent anything he said; and yet, quite apart from the fact that he had come between us, I longed intensely to smack his handsome face and offer him a choice of weapons. I don't know why I should have thought in terms of the duel. But Wyndham was like that, and I felt that, if ever it should come to the point, we should probably find ourselves outside the moat at 6 A. M., with sword and dagger. The worst of it was that I could not honestly find it in my heart to be surprised at Ann. The man was amusing and attractive. He obviously admired her, and I've yet to meet the girl who is displeased when a really

personable fellow makes no secret of the fact that he is smitten. I gathered from their conversation that Ann had at one time or another seen him rather frequently. There were references to Cup Day at Ascot and a moonlight picnic at Maidenhead. The conversation, in fact, mainly turned upon reminiscences from which I was excluded.

"Left at the post," I muttered as the lunch drew heavily to an end.

I called for my bill as soon as I decently could, having no desire to prolong my discomfiture. Wyndham looked at me with a friendly smile.

"I hope we may meet again," he said.

"Quite," I answered.

I paid my bill and moved off, leaving them together. The farewell to Ann, though we should probably meet again in an hour or so, was ceremonious in the extreme, and I could almost hear the chuckle which Wyndham so courteously restrained.

On the way back to my compartment I met the swarthy little man of the suitcases. The train lurched as we came abreast, so that I stumbled against him. There was something hard and round in the pocket of his coat. Muttering an apology, he continued on his way towards the restaurant car. Probably he was going to fetch Ann. Perhaps Peter had swallowed a button or was asking some one to tell him a story. A few steps onward I passed the compartment which had been reserved for the boy and his suite. The door was closed and the blinds drawn. It was certainly a most exclusive party.

I passed on to my own compartment. Granby was apparently asleep and did not choose to wake up till we were nearing Paris.

I told him of my encounter with Ann.

"In other words," said Granby, "you lamentably failed to control the situation. Never mind, laddie. If the young

hopefuls really knew how to deal with the opposite sex there would be less chance for the old stagers."

At the Gare du Nord we had a short and sharp discussion. Granby was of the opinion that we had been seen quite enough together, and he refused to share a taxi with me across Paris to the Gare de Lyon. We had better, he said, travel separately from that point onwards. I was to ignore his presence on the train to Geneva, and get in touch with him again at the Pension de la Reine on the following day. By the time we had finished our debate most of the passengers had left the station. I saw no sign of Ann or her party on the platform or at the buffet of the Gare de Lyon, where I dined before claiming my sleeper on the night express.

I rested badly in the sleeping car. The train rocked and swayed. The weather was hot and oppressive, and sleep was impossible. I saw Ann for a moment before shutting myself up for the night, but she took no notice of me and I did not thrust myself forward. We were all in the same coach, Granby occupying a compartment further down, while Ann and her charge, with the bowler-hatted men, took the middle of the coach.

I must, finally, have fallen into a sort of doze for I remember waking with a start to find the train had stopped for the fourth or fifth time that night, without any obvious reason. At first I thought we must have reached the frontier at Vallorbe, and, getting out of bed, I opened the door of the compartment and moved into the corridor. It was still dark. We were, I perceived, in the heart of the Jura, which rose steeply from the railway, the lower slopes dark with fir. I stood for a moment gazing out of the window. There was, I thought, a hint of morn-ing in the sky.

It was fresh in the corridor, fresher than I expected to find it, and I noted with some surprise, for it was unusual

in a foreign train, that one of the big windows was wide open. We were nowhere within sight or sound of a station, and, perceiving that the train had stopped for some mysterious purpose of its own, I went back into my compartment.

Again I fell into a doze, for I remember nothing more till the sleeping-car attendant came along and roused me, saying that we should be at the frontier in a quarter of an hour.

I got up and dressed, and, as Ann was on the train, and as we must suffer to be beautiful, I shaved myself hastily in the dribble of ice-water which is all that I can ever get from the tap of a *wagon-lit*. The train stopped just as I had finished dressing, and I saw the platform at Vallorbe and the customs officials. Presently they appeared — a Swiss *gendarme* and two *douaniers* in grey-green uniforms, followed by a little man in plain clothes, who was controlling the passports. They stopped importantly outside that part of the coach reserved for Ann and her party. One of the bowler-hatted men looked swiftly out and I saw with surprise that the Swiss *gendarme* recognised and even saluted him. I turned back into my compartment and began to get my things together, when I was startled by a series of exclamations in the corridor. Leaving my luggage, I looked to see what was happening, and was staggered to see that Ann herself was standing at the door of her compartment. Her face was ashen and in her eyes was a look of distress, mounting almost to panic.

I hurried forward, forgetting in an instant the way she had ignored me on the previous day.

"Ann," I said, almost as agitated as she was. "What on earth is the matter? What has happened?"

She looked at me wildly.

"Peter," she said. "Peter. I — he's not there." She pointed blindly towards the door of the compartment next to her.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Has he — disappeared?"

"He has gone. He isn't there. He was in the compartment next to mine with Mischa."

The two bowler-hatted men, but this time they were not wearing their hats, were bearing down upon us. I drew Ann swiftly into her own compartment.

"Who is Mischa?" I said. "And what does this mean?"

"Mischa is the valet," she replied. "He's in there. He doesn't seem to be — there's something wrong."

She pointed to the door that communicated with the compartment next her own. There, sure enough, was Mischa. He was lying in the bottom berth breathing stertorously, and his face was flushed. The air in the compartment was close and stuffy. Peter was nowhere to be seen.

I turned to Ann. Her distress seemed out of all proportion to the event.

"Come," I said. "The boy can't be very far away. And in any case there's nothing to be frightened about."

"But, John, they have taken him."

"Kidnapped, you mean?"

She nodded, her lips quivering and her face twisted with fear.

"Then his people will have to ransom him," I said as lightly as I could. "This sort of thing has happened before. The son of a millionaire —"

But I got no further.

"Son of a millionaire," she echoed. "I wish it were no worse."

I stared at her in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" I faltered.

Then, as she did not answer, I took her urgently by the arm. "Who, then, is Peter?" I asked.

"Peter is the King of Roumania," she said.

CHAPTER V

I WITNESS AN ERUPTION

I stared at her in blank astonishment.

I seem always to be recording astonishment, but, come to think of it, what else could be my feelings during those early days? I had not yet quite learned to take things as they came, and I cannot yet promise never to turn a hair.

Peter was the King of Roumania, and the King of Roumania had disappeared. Meanwhile, Ann was standing in front of me, looking more than a little shattered.

I took her by the arm.

"Ann," I began.

But she shook me off. I saw one of the two bowler-hatted men summoning her, as it seemed, to a consultation in the compartment lately occupied by Peter.

"I must go, John," she said. "I must see this business through myself."

She disappeared into the compartment and left me standing in the corridor. What was I to do? I thought at once of Granby. He had obviously known all about Peter. He had even suspected that Ann would need to be on the alert. Granby was the man. He was used to dealing with situations of this kind. I sped down the corridor.

I have a confused recollection of brushing past Swiss customs officials, assuring them that I had nothing to declare, and gaining the door of Granby's compartment before they had the time to verify my statement.

"Granby," I began, once more forgetting that officially he had ceased to exist.

I stopped abruptly, for the compartment was empty. There came a tap on my shoulder and I swung round. The attendant in his chocolate uniform was at my elbow and he handed me a folded slip of paper.

"The gentleman in this compartment," he said, "asked me to give you this note."

I opened the note and read:

My friends are meeting me in a motor car. Get in touch with the Pension de la Reine, but not till you hear from me.

The note was unsigned. I looked at the attendant.

"Which way did the gentleman go?" I asked.

"He left the train a moment ago," the man answered. "He met some friends on the platform and they went away together."

I moved slowly back along the corridor. Through the window I caught a momentary glimpse of Wyndham talking with some customs officials. I quickened my steps. If Ann needed help she should have it from me and not from him. The corridor was now clear of customs officials, and the door of the compartment into which Ann had been summoned a few minutes ago was closed. From behind came the sound of voices raised in high discussion. Ann was facing the music and I decided that she should not face it alone. I pushed open the door without ceremony and entered. The bowler-hatted men were, as I suspected, hard at work and they appeared to be taking it in turns. One of them, as I entered, was shaking his fist at Ann with intent to impress her with the force and point of the words which were pouring from his lips.

My intervention was brief. I caught the shaking fist and swung its owner round with a gesture that brought us face to face.

"Sir," I said in French, "you are wasting your time.

The lady knows no more how His Majesty disappeared than you do."

"His Majesty?" exclaimed the other man, bounding from his seat on the lower berth. "Who the devil are you, sir?"

"Harmony, gentlemen, harmony," I replied.

They gazed at me blankly, from which I perceived that they knew no English.

"Ann," I said quickly over my shoulder, "you'd better leave these fellows to me."

"Don't be absurd," she said sharply. "They are the personal *aides-de-camp* of the King."

But one of them was now addressing me.

"How did you recognise His Majesty?" he said. "I think you should be at once arrested."

"Who the devil are you, sir?" repeated the other.

I looked at him quietly. Then, diving into my pocket-book, produced the card with which I usually travelled as a member of the Secretariat of the League of Nations, a pink slip of cardboard, containing my photograph on one side and a statement on the other to the effect that I possessed certain diplomatic privileges as belonging to an international organisation. It had so far seldom proved of use, and my advice to any one entitled to exceptional privileges in his dealings with Continental officials is to say nothing about them. Such a document usually leads to argument and delay on both sides. On this occasion, however, it worked. The *aide-de-camp* of His Majesty, the King of Roumania, looked carefully at the pink slip, even adjusting a monocle in order to do so, while his colleague stared at it over his shoulder.

"Your name is Baxter," said the first of them, handing me back the card.

"I know that," I answered.

"What are you doing here?" he continued.

"I have the honour to be a friend of this lady," I answered.

"The lady will need all her friends," said the man. "The fact that you happen to be one of them does not, however, explain your presence here."

"It may be more to the point," I said sharply, "that I have incidentally been entrusted with a confidential mission to His Excellency Monsieur Radulara, who is, I believe, your Prime Minister."

They looked at me in silence for a moment, and then one of them bowed.

"May we ask," he began; but Ann did not give him time to finish.

"What are we to do, Count?" she asked impatiently. "There is no time to lose discussing the credentials of Mr. Baxter. We must apply at once to the police."

The man addressed as Count turned upon her savagely.

"You will take your orders from me," he said brutally, "and keep your advice until it is needed."

"I think the lady has made a most sensible suggestion," I said, boiling inwardly.

"Hold your tongue, sir," said the Count. "The greatest pains have been taken. His Majesty is travelling in strict *incognito*, and now you want every goddam son of a policeman running round and saying, '*Eh, ma foi, il faut faire quelque chose.*'"

He paused for breath, and his colleague took up the story.

"We must move with discretion," he said. "The police must be informed, but there must be no publicity."

"I refuse to take the responsibility," said the Count.

"Very well," said his companion. "I suggest we communicate at once with His Excellency."

He rang the bell furiously. The chocolate-clad attendant entered.

"How much longer before the train leaves?" asked the Count.

The attendant glanced at his watch.

"A quarter of an hour, Monsieur," he answered.

The Count, suddenly dynamic, leaped for the door, and a moment later we saw him scattering officials, passengers, porters and luggage in every direction, as he made towards the station telephone box.

"How to move with discretion," I murmured.

His colleague followed at a more leisurely pace with the object, apparently, of asking the station master to hold the train.

I turned to Ann and sought for words to comfort her. She was already, however, bending over the unconscious Mischa. She shook him, at first gently, then more vigorously, by the shoulder, but he did not stir. I bent to examine him myself. He was breathing stertorously but regularly. I lifted one of the eyelids. The pupil appeared to be contracted.

"He has been drugged or gassed," I said.

"Drugged, I should think," she answered tonelessly. "It may be some time before he recovers."

I helped her to make him comfortable. It must have taken longer than I thought, for I was just about to make a determined effort to get Ann to discuss the situation with me when the Count reappeared with his understudy in the company of an official in plain clothes whom I shortly discovered to be the local sleuth in charge of the half a dozen detectives on duty at the station. His usual work, I gathered, included the searching of suspected passengers for hidden cigarettes, drugs or musical instruments. Trombones in the trousers he might have been able to deal with, but disappearing kings were a little out of his line. He very creditably refused, however, to be impressed and took our depositions without changing a

muscle. He asked us very particularly whether we had any idea where the abduction could have taken place. We could none of us give him any definite information. I, who had been the most wakeful of the party, told him that the train had stopped several times during the night. The detective decided to question the engine driver as soon as we reached Lausanne. We were by this time already halfway to our destination.

"You understand," said the Count when the business was concluded, "not a word of this is to be made public. The utmost discretion is necessary."

"I quite understand," said the officer. "I would now with your permission examine the compartment. For possible clues, you know," he added hopefully.

We all adjourned to my own compartment, with the exception of the still unconscious Mischa.

"Now, Mr. Backstairs," said the Count. "We don't know who you are. Nor, apparently, does His Excellency Monsieur Radulara with whom I have just been talking on the telephone. But you have somehow learned the identity of the boy, so unfortunately entrusted to the care of this — er — young person —"

"And to your own care," I interrupted.

He winced at that.

"Very possibly," he said shortly. "But our instructions are definite. We are to proceed as fast as possible to Geneva, where His Excellency the Prime Minister is at present attending a meeting of the Council of the League of Nations. I suggest you accompany me to that interview. It will not be a pleasant one for any of us."

"I am quite ready," I said. "Monsieur Radulara has not yet received my credentials; they will reach him to-day or at latest to-morrow morning."

A few minutes later the train drew into Lausanne.

Here the Count showed himself unexpectedly efficient.

"You will stay here with Mischa," he said to his companion. "Get an ambulance and bring him along with you to Geneva as soon as you can. Come straight to the Hôtel des Bergues. You can report to His Excellency on your arrival."

The Count turned sharply to Ann and myself.

"You two can come with me," he said. "We will go by car."

Without a word we turned and left the coach. One of the valets — there appeared to be two of them who had not travelled in the *wagon-lit* with the rest of the party — appeared and took charge of the luggage, including my own. We crossed the platform and passed through the barrier to the station square outside.

I could not help wondering during that drive to Geneva why so much emphasis was being laid on the avoidance of publicity. There must be questions of high policy involved. It was perhaps as important to conceal the fact that the King of Roumania had been kidnapped as to recover him. The Roumanian party in power was of the royalist persuasion, and loyalty to the throne was its strongest support. I knew enough about Roumanian politics to be aware that such a disaster as the disappearance of the young King might well lead to the overthrow of the present government. If the King had been abducted by agents of the republican or some other party, Radulara, to save his position, must recover him before the loss became public. I began to realise, with anxious glances at the set face of Ann, the extent of the predicament.

The Count informed us during the drive that Radulara would receive us immediately on our arrival.

"And I advise you," he said, sharply turning upon Ann, "to be perfectly frank with His Excellency."

She looked at him as though he, and, for that matter, the world at large had ceased to exist.

"I have nothing to conceal," she said.

I spent the rest of the drive thinking with dread of the coming interview. It was pretty clear that Ann would be put through it in the Continental manner, and I should be, as it were, standing by. It was a grim prospect, in which I saw myself, albeit an international official, sorely tempted to abandon the neutrality which I was expected on all occasions to maintain.

It was half past ten in the morning when we drew up in front of the Hôtel des Bergues. It stands opposite the Island of Rousseau, with a balcony that gives upon the Rhône as it runs swiftly from the lake. Delegates from the greater nations can, without losing caste, take up their quarters elsewhere. For nations less august, with appearances to keep up, the Bergues is as necessary as a Rolls Royce to those who are also in society. A *commissionnaire* in the quiet livery that suggests a hushed but lavish expenditure assisted us to alight. We were evidently expected, for a nervous secretary met us on the threshold and hurried us, almost without a word into the lift, and thence into a small anteroom. There I beheld two men in the uniform of "Aspaleia." I should perhaps explain that Aspaleia is a curious organisation of private detectives, peculiar to Geneva. Its members are allowed to wear uniform and to act as caretakers, ushers, personal attendants, doorkeepers, guards or sleuths for the great, or as general utility men for the benefit of anybody who cares to hire them. More than one diplomat makes use of their services during his stay in the city of Calvin. Radulara did himself well. He had two of them.

A door was thrown open. We passed into the next room and I found myself in the presence of the great Balkan statesman, His Excellency Alexander Radulara. He was

installed in his private sitting room overlooking the lake, and furnished more comfortably than is usual in hotels. The remains of his *petit déjeuner* had been pushed aside on the table in front of him. He had partaken, it appeared, of chocolate and whipped cream, and there was a large chocolate cake on a plate beside him. He was not yet fully dressed, but was wearing a huge quilted dressing gown of a sombre hue pulled closely about his ears for warmth, and a thick rug was spread over his knees. With his thin yellow face, prominent teeth and beady eyes he looked in that overheated room like a declimatised bird in a tropical aviary.

He did not rise at our entrance, but stretched out a lean hand to a large electric radiator which was glowing red hot within a few feet of him. All the windows were shut, though it was a bright sunny morning.

"Count Tisco," he suddenly said, darting his lean yellow head at us with its black hair slicked back from the high forehead, "it seems you have something very grave to report?"

Count Tisco, as I could see, knew scarcely how to begin. That was hardly surprising. I knew Radulara of old at the Council table of the League. He could be trusted to make a scene on the smallest provocation, and I trembled to think what he might be capable of when roused. And he was going to be roused with a vengeance. While Count Tisco was screwing his courage to the sticking place, I watched the man who had survived several revolutions and was still a master in his own house. He looked scarcely a day over forty, but he was, nevertheless, an invalid. He spoke in a high falsetto.

"Well, man," he continued, "don't stand there licking your lips, but tell me the facts."

He was like a cat, I suddenly thought. He knew that the King had been kidnapped, but for the moment he

was controlling the rage that shook him internally. Tisco was his mouse, but the cat was for the moment using velvet paws. He wanted the facts. Then he would be all claws and fury.

Count Tisco began his tale while Radulara gently, too gently, prompted him from time to time.

"We found the valet, Mischa, unconscious on the floor of his compartment," concluded the Count. "He has not yet recovered consciousness. We are bringing him to Your Excellency in an ambulance, so that you may question him if you wish to do so."

There was a slight pause when Count Tisco had finished, and I waited for the annihilation of the mouse. But Radulara to my horror turned abruptly from the Count and looked at Ann. His voice was calm, but his eyes were glittering with rage.

"Is this correct?" he said.

Ann was unflinching. She was thinking, as I knew, of Peter, and not of the man in front of her.

"Perfectly correct," she answered coolly. "Your Excellency will remember my instructions. His Majesty, being seven years old, was to sleep in the company of his personal attendant. He was accordingly with Mischa, and I occupied the compartment next door. When I went to him in the morning he was not there, and Mischa was lying unconscious."

"What time was this?" said Radulara.

"Shortly before we reached the frontier station at Val-lorbe," she replied.

"What were you doing up to that moment?" he said.

"Sleeping."

I was watching Ann, but became aware that the glittering eyes of Radulara had turned in my direction. I met them as well as I could.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is Baxter," I answered. "I happened to be travelling in the same coach as His Majesty and — er — when he disappeared, I — er — ventured to offer my services."

"Why?" said Radulara.

"I am not entirely a stranger to this affair," I said. "I have a message for Your Excellency."

Radulara turned to Count Tisco, who answered the question implied in the gesture.

"That is so, Your Excellency. Mr. Baxter evidently knows more of this affair than he has as yet chosen to divulge. I have no idea what his message may be. In accordance with your instructions over the telephone, I have brought him here with us."

I do not know what Radulara next said to Count Tisco, for at this point he broke into Roumanian. It must have been well worth hearing. The words came in a deluge from his lips, and I felt that Count Tisco would never again have any illusion as to his capacity or character. He flushed, and then went as white as his spats. For a moment I wondered whether he would strike the man who rated him, or faint upon the carpet. Finally there was a pause in the tirade, followed by a few short words of command.

Count Tisco walked uncertainly to the door, which I opened for him myself. He did not seem to see the door knob very clearly.

"One fool less," said Radulara, relapsing into French.

"Come over here," he added almost in the same breath, nodding his head in the direction of Ann.

I felt my hackles rising as she moved towards him.

"Now then, my girl," he continued, "what have you done with the King?"

"I don't know what Your Excellency means," said Ann.

She was not, I was glad to see, much affected by his

tone. I could read the secret of her courage. Her mind was on the disaster, and could not be brought to concern itself with this furious man — Peter was lost — nothing else mattered.

"I think you do know," said Radulara. "You have basely failed in your task. It is incredible that this was an accident. Was it Ciuntu and his peasants? How many thousands have lined your pretty pocket? Answer me."

He rose to his feet, picking up the travelling rug of fur from his knees and throwing it round his shoulders. The gesture, at any other moment, would have been ludicrous. The man was shaking like a leaf, almost beside himself with passion or fear, perhaps a mixture of both.

"Your Excellency is mistaken," said Ann, almost as though she regarded him as an irresponsible child. He stood now in the middle of the room, his hands twisting and untwisting the silken cord of his dressing gown.

"Then in God's name what has happened to you all?" he said, his voice rising continually higher, till it was little more than a thin scream. "Are you all mad or drunk? His Majesty is sent to England for his health. He passes three months in the care of the English police, surrounded by every care, strictly *incognito*, detectives everywhere, guarded like the golden apple of the Hesperides. Then because, mark you just because, the arrangements for his journey back to his own Kingdom are altered in one little detail, everything goes wrong. We antedated his return by one week and he is kidnapped, disappears, vanishes into thin air. And you, my girl, are responsible. The whole of a great nation is cast into peril by the dishonest laziness of a damned English governess."

"By God, Your Excellency," I broke in, "this is too much."

He turned on me swiftly.

"Hold your tongue, sir," he snapped. "You English are

all alike. The world, for you, is your oyster. The rest of us can go to the devil, as usual."

I will not attempt to reproduce all that he said. The violence of his language was such that I had visions of having, after a time, to hold the man down while Ann telephoned for an ambulance and a strait waistcoat. The veins stood out on his forehead, and now and then he wiped the foam from the corners of his mouth with a brown silk handkerchief.

"I have nothing to say to Your Excellency," said Ann, when finally he paused for breath, "except, of course, to resign my post at once."

"Resign," he echoed with an hysterical laugh. "You lose the King who was placed in your care and then you coolly offer to resign. That is very noble of you. And you don't even mention the wages you haven't earned."

He fumbled in the pocket of his dressing gown as he spoke and flung a roll of notes upon the floor at her feet.

"There they are," he continued, "and you may consider yourself lucky that you are not under arrest."

"I do not wish to excuse myself, Excellency," she said. "I will, however, point out that His Majesty when he — disappeared was not for the moment in my charge, but in the care of your own countrymen. I invite the fullest investigation."

She looked the Prime Minister full in the face for a moment and then walked straight out of the room.

The notes flung by Radulara upon the floor remained where they had fallen between us. He looked at them for a moment and thence to the door which had closed behind Ann. He stooped with an effort, picked up the notes, and put them back into the pocket of his dressing gown. He seemed now very frail, and in spite of my indignation I pitied him. His passion was exhausted. It had emptied him

of his vitality. He motioned me to a chair and himself sat down again beside the electric radiator.

I mastered with a great effort my impulse to give him a bit of my mind for the way in which he had treated Ann and decided to keep my temper as long as I could.

"Let me assure Your Excellency," I began, "that no blame can be attached to any of the escort of His Majesty. I travelled with them from London and can bear witness to their devotion."

He waved his hand impatiently.

"I want to hear no more of this," he said. "I shall have full details presently. Give me your message and then leave me. There is everything yet to do."

He paused a moment as though in thought, and then I found him looking at me keenly.

"I have seen you before," he said.

"Very possibly," I answered drily.

"You keep the records of the Council of the League," he went on. "I have seen you at secret meetings."

"That is so," I said. "But my credentials are not, as it happens, from the League. They are from Colonel Granby, a distinguished member of the British Intelligence Service, who is at present impersonating the late Mr. McGuffie."

I thought it best to plunge at once deeply in and startle him. His head came back sharply.

"What is that?" he said. "Is Angus McGuffie dead?"

"Angus McGuffie was murdered the day before yesterday," I replied. "The murder has been kept secret, and the place of Angus McGuffie is being taken by Colonel Granby at the suggestion of the British authorities."

Radulara was bewildered. He passed a hand across his high forehead.

"I don't understand," he said. "What is the reason for this extraordinary arrangement?"

"Colonel Granby is impersonating Angus McGuffie so

that he may get into touch with a mysterious and possibly dangerous organisation known as the Five Flamboys."

Radulara sat motionless in his chair, the heavy rug drawn closely about his shoulders. He shivered slightly. Only his eyes were alive in the birdlike head.

"What do you know of the Flamboys?" he said at last.

"Nothing at all. No more does Colonel Granby. All we know is that this man, McGuffie, who has been communicating, I believe, with Your Excellency in connection with a Roumanian loan, was to meet the Flamboys here in Geneva. Colonel Granby proposes to keep that appointment."

Radulara looked at me keenly.

"Angus McGuffie," he said, "was to have delivered some important papers to the Roumanian Legation in London."

His face was grey with anxiety. He leaned over the small table between us, as though to take the words from my mouth.

"The papers were delivered," I said.

Radulara sat back in his chair.

"I must have those papers, and I must have them at once," he continued.

"You will receive them to-morrow morning," I assured him. "They are coming over to-night in the Foreign Office bag, together with a full description of Colonel Granby and the part he is playing. I hope I make myself clear?"

There was a short pause. Radulara was looking at me intently.

"Do you," he asked, "know anything of the nature of those papers?"

"They are the plans of an oil well of which McGuffie claimed to have exclusive knowledge."

There was another short silence. Radulara appeared to be considering the information I had given him.

"Well, sir," he said at last, "you are very well-informed."

"I know only what Colonel Granby has told me," I answered, "and I am in this matter only a go-between. I have come to you because Colonel Granby, as he is now impersonating McGuffie, cannot safely do so himself."

"This Colonel Granby," he said. "I have heard the name before. He was, I think, a British agent in the Balkans during the war."

"You will receive his credentials to-morrow morning together with full particulars of his plans and the papers concerning the well."

"When does the bag arrive?" he asked.

"It should arrive at Lausanne in the course of the night," I said. "The King's Messenger takes it with the bags for Belgrade, Sofia and Constantinople."

"Then I can have those papers first thing to-morrow morning," he concluded.

"The bag will be brought to Geneva by the British Vice Consul, and the contents distributed in the ordinary way at about ten o'clock."

He looked at me, debating some matter in his mind.

"I am spending the night away from Geneva," he said at last, "and it would help me considerably to have those papers before I return to this hotel. You know a good deal about matters in which my country is vitally concerned. Can you in any way short-circuit the distribution of these dispatches? Could you, for example, go yourself to Lausanne and take delivery of the papers that are coming to me?"

"I think it could be arranged," I answered after a moment's consideration.

He crossed to a small writing table, sat down and scribbled a few lines.

"As soon as you get the papers," he said, "bring them to

me at the *château* of Monsieur Gemusier. Every one knows the house. It is not far from Morges."

I raised my eyebrows at that. Gemusier was a well-known banker and reputed to be the richest man in Switzerland.

Radulara finished writing and held out to me a slip of paper.

"Here," he said, "is a note authorising you to take delivery of the dispatches to myself. I should, perhaps, have sent Tisco on this mission, but he seems to have lost the small intelligence with which I was foolish enough to credit him. Never was a man so ill-served."

I took the note and placed it in my pocketbook.

"Remember," he continued sharply, "there is to be no word of this to any one. Secrecy is essential. This applies also to the abduction of the King —"

The thin voice trailed away into silence, and I was astonished and not a little moved, to see that the queer bird-like face was working.

"The King," he repeated softly. "We shall recover him — But if harm should come to him — King Peter —"

He seemed suddenly to remember my presence, for he turned to me and continued in his ordinary voice, "Not a word, do you understand? And particularly not a word at your Palace of Nations. It is a talking shop, and your secrets are discussed at every dinner table in Europe."

"Your Excellency, you may rely on my discretion," I replied stiffly. "I will show your note to the British Vice Consul in Geneva whose duty it is to receive the bag from the King's Messenger at Lausanne. I will go with him myself and take the dispatches as you direct to the house of Monsieur Gemusier near Morges."

Radulara rose from the table and touched a bell. It tinkled sharply in the next room. The door opened and a secretary entered.

I bowed to Radulara in acknowledgment of my dismissal and left the room.

Looking at my watch as I closed the door, I saw it was already past midday, and I wondered what had happened to Ann. I did not even know where she was and I looked about in vain for Tisco or some member of the party who might tell me, perhaps, where she had gone. There was no sign, however, of any of the Roumanians, and the hotel porter could tell me nothing of consequence. The lady had come downstairs, he said, and with the help of the driver of the car which had brought us to the hotel had transferred her luggage to a taxi and driven away. She had told no one of her destination.

My only comfort was that she could always find me if she needed help, and could bring herself to ask for it. My name was in the telephone book, or I could always be reached at the Secretariat of the League. I was afraid, however, that Ann would see me damned first. She was that sort of girl.

I was hungry and much in need of a hot bath. I accordingly called a taxi and drove at once to the Rue du Cloître where, in the shadow of the cathedral, I had for the last six months been modestly installed in a small flat. There I had a bath and then some lunch at a restaurant in the Old Town.

Towards two o'clock I extracted my car from the garage where it had been reposing during my leave and so proceeded to the office. I called on the way at the British Consulate and there saw for a moment my friend, Captain Gaylor, the Vice Consul. I told him briefly of my mission, and we arranged that I should go with him to meet the Orient Express at Lausanne and take delivery of the dispatches for Radulara.

I was kept busy at the office until nearly six. I had, in fact, only just finished my work when the telephone bell

on my desk rang sharply. I picked up the receiver, and a well-known voice came over the wire.

"Thank God," I murmured, for it was Ann.

"John," she was saying urgently, "you don't, perhaps, happen to have a car?"

"Wrong again," I said in my brightest manner.

"Is it a good one?"

"Pretty fair."

"Then I want you to do me a favour. Fill it up with petrol and meet me in a quarter of an hour on the Pont du Mont Blanc. Can you manage it?"

"To the ends of the earth," I began.

"Thank you, John," she said, and left me staring into a dumb receiver.

CHAPTER VI

I TAKE LEAVE OF MY SENSES

It takes less than three minutes to drive from the Secretariat of the League of Nations to the Pont du Mont Blanc, and I did it in two. Then I remembered that Ann had given me a quarter of an hour. I accordingly left the car at the end of the Quai by the bridge and walked across to the Pension de la Reine. Granby did not expect me to get in touch with him unprompted, but I thought I might as well inquire as to his arrival.

I was informed at once that Mr. Angus McGuffie had taken a room at the Pension and was expected to dine there. The proprietor remembered him well. There had, I gathered, been a considerable discussion about the price of the room.

I smiled happily for the first time since my return to Switzerland. Granby was playing up and Ann had at last asked me to do her a service. I left the Pension and walked lightly across the road. There, indeed, was Ann herself standing beside the car.

"You are two minutes late," she said.

"Where do you want to go?" I asked.

"To Lausanne," she replied.

That was what we each of us said, but I knew that Ann was thanking me for my prompt answer to her appeal, and *she* knew—well I'm never quite sure how much exactly Ann does know. Lausanne, by the way, was between thirty and forty miles away, but that was irrelevant. I was even astonished at her moderation.

I backed the car and turned it without a word. Explanations might come later. We ran along the side of the lake, back past the offices of the Secretariat and so to the main road from Geneva to Lausanne. It was a lovely summer evening, and the Aiguilles of Chamonix, fading from pale rose to grey, stood in silhouette against the sky. Alone, and very valorous in his isolation, stood Mont Blanc, fifty miles away, taking a farewell salute from the sun which, invisible to us, could still reach him from where it had gone down behind the Jura.

Soon we were approaching Versoix, the little village on the lake which Voltaire had once wished to transform into a rival of Geneva. The road led past private houses set in parks, with lovely trees, but, owing to their lack of flowers, colourless to the English eye. On our right was the lake, troubled by a faint wind from the north, enlivened here and there by the white sails of the yachts stealing home to their moorings and the outlandish dignity of a great barge with its two butterfly sails bringing stones from Meillerie.

"Well," said I at last, for Ann had not yet spoken, "why are we going to Lausanne?"

She looked at me anxiously.

"I hope I'm not upsetting your plans," she replied.

"No," I said. "Only changing them. Which reminds me. I must telephone to the British Consulate. Can you spare me a minute at Versoix?"

"If it is important," she replied.

"I'm afraid it is," I said.

I did not tell her that I was now in the service of Radulara. Tact, I felt, was indicated.

I accelerated along the stretch of road into the village and pulled up at the post office, where I left the car and in a very short space of time was speaking with Captain Gaylor. I told him that I had changed my plans. I would

not go with him to Lausanne in his car as we had arranged that afternoon, but meet him in my own. He demurred a bit at this until I told him that I was already on the way to Lausanne. Then he agreed.

"Very well, Baxter," came the thin voice down the wire, "meet me in the station square at eleven o'clock."

I returned to the car and we swung out again along the road to Coppet. I turned to Ann and asked again the inevitable question, "Why are we going to Lausanne?"

"It was Mischa," she said, "who put me in mind of it."

"One up to Mischa," I said.

"You remember him?"

"Of course. The little valet who was doped."

"I went to see him this afternoon," said Ann. "I always rather liked Mischa. They have put him in the cantonal hospital, and he will be all right in a day or two. The doctors say he must have inhaled some sort of gas."

"So that's what it was," I said. "Ann, this is an absolute nightmare. You mean that they pumped gas into his compartment?"

"So it seems. He tucked up Peter at about 10 P. M. in the top bunk and climbed into the bottom one himself. Not another thing can he remember till he found himself in bed at the hospital. Then he asked for me. The moment we were alone he mentioned some one we both dislike. He thinks she may possibly have had a hand in this business. I am going to find out."

Ann was looking pretty grim, and there was some one she disliked. Soon perhaps she would be more lucid. For the moment she was gazing intently at scenery she did not seem to see. It included, among other things, the celebrated *château* of Madame de Staël, with its green window blinds and weather-beaten stone front, for we were now running into Coppet.

"It's a Mademoiselle Vallier," Ann continued at last.

"She was Peter's governess and was with him for two years. I suppose we hated each other at sight."

"You took her place?"

"That is one of her grievances."

"What are the others?"

"Well, she's not as young as she was."

"I see. But why should you think she can have had anything to do with the disappearance of the King?"

"I believe her to be capable of anything."

"But that isn't evidence, Ann."

"It does very well for a start. Besides she lives in Lausanne."

"The case for the Crown is still a little weak," I protested.

"Please trust one woman to be right about another," said Ann.

That, however, is a thing I am never able to do. Nevertheless, I did not mention it.

"She was furious when I took her place," continued Ann. "She maintained that she could speak English as well as an Englishwoman and could certainly teach the King all that was necessary. She does indeed speak it very well."

"Do you seriously suggest," I asked, "that this woman has kidnapped Peter merely because she has ceased to be his governess? Think of the organisation required. There is more in this than the freak of a spiteful woman."

"But she may know something about it," persisted Ann. "She is just the sort of person who would. What I mean is that whoever planned this affair would naturally go to her."

"There may be something in that," I admitted dubiously.

"You, of course, will probably think she is innocent," continued Ann. "She is still sufficiently good-looking."

I groaned inwardly. Ann was getting huffy again. Should I tell her about the Flamboys? No — Ann must be kept out of this. She was already taking far too much on herself, and I had no wish to see her getting deeper into the toils. If she suspected the ex-governess of Peter why didn't she go to Radulara and say so?

"You insist on seeing this woman," I said at last.

"Certainly I do."

"Very well, my dear. But I don't think it can possibly do any good."

She turned to me in sudden anger. Or perhaps it was desperation.

"I will leave nothing undone," she exclaimed. "I'm not asking you to think. I'm asking you to drive me to Lausanne."

"Steady, Ann," I murmured.

"And please don't talk to me as though I were a horse," she added.

She gave a laugh that was as nearly hysterical as a laugh can be. I held grimly to the wheel and changed the subject.

"You know, of course, where the woman lives," I inquired.

"No," said Ann. "We are going to call at every house in the canton of Vaud till we find her home. You do ask silly questions, John."

"Sorry," I muttered.

"She lives in a small street above the main part of the town," continued Ann, after a pause.

"You are going there alone?" I asked.

"Of course."

"Why, of course? Why don't you go to the police?"

"Because I've nothing to go upon."

"Then why go at all?"

We were approaching Rolle as I spoke, and automat-

ically I slowed down the car, for there is nearly always a police trap thereabouts.

"When I took on my job as governess," continued Ann, "I promised to look after Peter to the best of my ability. I have allowed him to disappear — slept soundly in my bunk while the little chap (and her lips trembled as she spoke) was taken away. And now you suggest I should do nothing and refuse to run the slightest risk to find out where he is. Thank you, John."

I was silent for a moment, while I took the car through Rolle, a matter which required care owing to a number of carts loaded with country produce.

"I appreciate all that," I persisted as soon as we were clear of the village. "But the King was lost through no fault of yours, and surely it is better to leave his recovery to those whose business it is."

"But they don't seem to care," she exclaimed, "about anything but their beastly politics. I'm not thinking of the King of Roumania. I'm thinking of Peter."

"Very well," I said, "we will see this woman. We will go to the house and, when you have satisfied yourself one way or the other, I will take you back to Geneva. I'm afraid, however, that you will have to wait some little time in Lausanne. I have to meet the Foreign Office bag from London at the station towards midnight, but I will somehow arrange to have you driven back, or I will drive you back myself."

Ann heard me out in silence. Her eyes were gleaming under the small dark hat.

"Thank you, John," she said. "You seem to have it all very well arranged. I am sorry to disappoint you, but please understand that I intend to carry this through by myself."

"You are not going to that house alone," I said.

"We will change the subject, please," said Ann.

"We will do nothing of the kind," I said. "Either you will allow me to come with you, or I shall stop the car here and now."

We were approaching Morges as I spoke, and I put my foot on the brake. Before I pressed it, however, the engine spluttered, coughed, and went completely dead. The car glided to a standstill at the edge of the road.

"Damn," I said with conviction.

It is one thing to stop a car on purpose and quite another when it stops of its own accord. Ann did not realise the position.

"John," she said angrily, "this is intolerable."

"It is," I conceded. "The car has broken down."

"Then I am going on without it," she exclaimed, and, pushing open the door, she jumped out and started to walk along the road into Morges. For a moment I was out of action and stood staring after her helplessly. The sight of her walking off like that in the twilight was as ludicrous as it was pathetic. I left the car and followed her rapidly down the road. What was she going to do? Lausanne was still six miles away.

"Ann," I shouted, breathless with speed and vexation.

She turned suddenly to the left and pulled up at the door of a garage. I reached her, just as she was about to open negotiations with a dirty looking fellow in blue overalls. I intervened, though by the look of Ann, it seemed as much as my life was worth.

"My car has broken down," I said. "It's either the carburettor or the magneto. Can you repair it quickly?"

"One must see it before one can say," replied the mechanic with the maddening deliberation of the expert.

"One must, of course," I admitted. "One must, therefore, pray Monsieur to come down the road with all speed."

"One will follow Monsieur," replied the mechanic.

"I am desolated to derange Monsieur," I assured him.

"Of nothing, of nothing," said the mechanic with condensation.

With mutual bows we started out of the garage.

"Please wait here," I said to Ann, feeling that I had mastered the situation.

"Certainly," she replied, "provided it is understood that we go to Lausanne in one car or another."

Together the mechanic and I proceeded down the street. Together we lifted the bonnet. Together we peered at the engine. The mechanic straightened his back.

"It is both the magneto *and* the carburettor," he announced.

He must be an expert, I reflected.

"Thank you," I said. "Is it serious?"

"If Monsieur can wait half an hour," he suggested.

"Monsieur cannot wait five minutes," came a voice from behind us.

Ann had followed us to the car and was standing implacably in the road.

"Mademoiselle will render an account to herself," said the mechanic, "that one cannot do the impossible."

"Is there no car in the garage?" Ann demanded.

"There is, as it happens, a car," said the mechanic with the beautiful air of a man entirely disinterested.

"Then we will hire it," said Ann. "Meanwhile, you will mend the car of Monsieur, and he will pick it up later this evening."

I stared at Ann in a hopeless sort of way. It seemed that I had not mastered the situation as completely as I had imagined.

The mechanic was looking at me with expectation. He seemed to divine that I was being, shall we say, hustled, and desired confirmation of the suggestion which had just been made.

"Well," I said, "can you take us to Lausanne and have my car repaired as Mademoiselle suggests?"

"For myself," said the mechanic, "it arranges itself well. But we must see whether it also arranges itself for the *patron*."

We returned to the garage and there encountered the *patron*, a man with a large face and a genial disposition. I explained to him the position.

"But certainly," he said. "François shall mend your car, and I myself will take Monsieur and Mademoiselle to Lausanne at once in my own."

So it was arranged. Incidentally, I paid in advance for the repairs and instructed François to leave my car outside the garage, as I intended to pick it up on my return after meeting the bag at midnight. Five minutes later I was sitting with Ann in the back of the hired car, with the *patron* at the wheel.

It was Ann who spoke first.

"You have, it seems, an appointment in Lausanne," she said.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because otherwise there would be no point in your coming any further," she said.

"I suppose not," I retorted, "since you now have another chauffeur."

Heartily I cursed the breakdown. It had deprived me of my only resource. I was now no more than a fellow passenger and I always feel a fool in another man's car. Had I known that the small misfortune which had just overtaken me was to save the whole situation within the next few hours, I should have felt less strongly on the subject. But I am going too fast.

Shortly before we reached Lausanne Ann leaned forward towards the driver. She gave him some directions, and we soon turned sharply to the left up the steep hill which

leads from the port of Ouchy on the lake into the city itself. Ten minutes later we found ourselves in a road of neat houses, bordering an enclosure with tennis courts. The houses were all detached, and were evidently quite new. We drew up at Number Fifteen.

Ann made to alight, but I laid my hand upon her arm, and I am sorry to say that under the curious eyes of our driver something not far removed from a scuffle occurred between us. The man who lives on nuts will never strike a woman, but there are occasions when the ordinary flesh-eater is compelled to remember that he is the stronger sex.

"Let me go, John," she said.

"What are you proposing to do?" I asked.

"I am going to call on Mademoiselle Vallier."

"The ex-governess?"

"The ex-governess. This is my affair, and I'm going to manage it in my own way."

"Certainly," I said. "But I intend to be there all the same."

"If you were a gentleman," she began.

"I am not a gentleman," I said. "At least, not for the moment."

"Wait here," I said to the driver and followed at her heels.

She jumped to the ground. We crossed the pavement and in silence she rang the bell.

It was an appreciable time before it was answered, and Ann, while she was waiting, elaborately ignored my presence. Then abruptly the door opened and there stood on the threshold a neat little man, dressed in black. It struck me as curious that any one living in so small a house should have a butler.

"Mademoiselle Vallier?" enquired Ann.

"She is not receiving this evening," replied the butler.

I glanced at my watch. It was nearly eight o'clock, not

in any case a tactful hour. The lady was presumably eating her dinner.

"Would you perhaps take my name?" requested Ann. "It is Mademoiselle Winspeare."

There was a movement in the hall behind the butler.

"Can it be Miss Winspeare?" came an unknown voice. "This is an unexpected pleasure."

The butler stood aside, and Mademoiselle Vallier, ex-governess of the King of Roumania, stood before us.

She was slight in build and dressed in the extreme of fashion, her frock being designed to show off a very supple and elegant figure. She had been, I suppose, a beautiful woman, and still was remarkably handsome, with light curling hair exquisitely dressed and cut short round a slim neck. Her features were good, but haggard, and a pair of dark brown eyes gazed at us with polite enthusiasm.

"But please come in," she said in excellent English. "How fortunate to see you!"

We entered the hall, and Mademoiselle Vallier, standing aside, motioned us into a room on the right. The butler took my hat and, a moment later, we found ourselves in a small *salon*, furnished in the new French fashion with low divans covered with silk stuffs and containing one or two pieces of futurist furniture in dark, exotic woods. A picture of three curious women with one garment between them filled the space above the mantelpiece. The woman had apparently been, in the language of my æsthetic friends, simplified, all the pretty little complications of nature having been ruthlessly eliminated.

Mademoiselle Vallier sat with Ann on the largest divan, while I was waved to a chair, shaped like a tulip cut in half and very uncomfortable.

Mademoiselle Vallier looked inquiringly at me.

Ann smiled engagingly.

"My cousin, Mr. Baxter," she said. "He drove me over from Geneva."

"Yes?" said our hostess.

She appeared to be waiting, quite naturally too, for an explanation of our untimely visit.

"I had to see you," said Ann. "I'd better tell you about it at once."

At that moment, however, the door opened and the butler appeared with a tray of cocktails. The cocktails were served, and we somehow contrived to talk of nothing in particular till the butler withdrew, while I wondered how Ann would begin. Would she try the gradual approach or jump in suddenly? I was not left long in doubt.

"It's Peter," she said, as the door closed.

"Peter?"

"Haven't you heard? His Majesty has disappeared."

"No," said Mademoiselle Vallier.

"Yes," said Ann.

Ann had her eyes fixed unblinkingly upon the woman's face. I don't know what she saw. For myself I saw nothing but blank astonishment.

"But, my dear," she said. "I don't understand. You don't mean that King Peter has been — lost?"

"We arrived at Vallorbe this morning. Peter was abducted from the train somewhere between Paris and the Swiss frontier. That is all we know."

Mademoiselle Vallier thrust out a thin hand, ringless and appealing.

"But how terrible," she said. "And how truly impossible."

"Perhaps I'd better tell you the whole story," said Ann.

Mademoiselle Vallier leaned forward, her white fingers interlocked, friendly and incredulous. She listened to Ann's brief account. Now and then a murmur of sympathy came

from her lips, and in her eyes was a look of infinite concern.

"So that's why the police came here this morning," she said.

I pricked up my ears. So did Ann.

"The police?" we murmured together.

"Yes, most impertinent of them. They executed a search warrant and were most mysterious. Of course, they found nothing. There was nothing to find."

The face of Ann was expressionless.

"This is a terrible business," Mademoiselle Vallier went on. "Especially as I suppose you feel that you are, in a sense, responsible."

"Yes," said Ann. "That is why I have come to you. They are, you see, doing almost nothing to recover him. The King's disappearance must be kept secret."

"Of course," said Mademoiselle Vallier. "I know them — these politicians. They think of nothing but affairs of State."

There were tears in her voice, even, perhaps, in her eyes, but I could not for the moment see her face very well from where I was sitting. She put her hand on Ann's arm.

"But tell me, my dear. How can I help you? I would, as you know, do anything. The instinct was right that brought you to me, and I appreciate it very much. I was rather afraid at one time that you might think I resented your appointment, and I must confess that I was a little hurt. But I'm so glad you realise that there was nothing *personal*. I should have felt the same about anybody else. In fact my one consolation in parting with His Majesty was that he took to you so easily, and that I knew he would be in safe hands."

"You are very kind," said Ann.

What could be fairer than that? My spirits began to

rise. The ex-governess was shaping better than I expected. And her cocktails were excellent.

"But how can I help you?" repeated Mademoiselle Vallier.

"I thought, perhaps, you might know something which would give us some sort of clue."

The eyes of Mademoiselle Vallier opened wide with astonishment. Ann, I was sorry to notice, was looking at the lady opposite with an expression more befitting a prosecuting counsel than a friend in need of assistance and advice. I groaned in secret. The bee in Ann's bonnet was buzzing worse than ever. Luckily our hostess did not seem to perceive it. She met Ann's searching gaze with a candour that should have convinced her worst enemy of her complete innocence in the matter.

"How do you mean?" she enquired. "I want to help you, of course. But it seems to me that you have recently had more opportunity than I have to acquire such information. I haven't seen His Majesty for over six months."

"But you know much more than I do about the people in Bucharest. Can you think of no one whose interest it might be to—to abduct the King of Roumania?"

"I see what you mean. But I'm afraid I can tell you nothing useful. I never had anything to do with the parties in Bucharest. I hate politics, as you know. I merely attended to my work and seldom left the nursery. I was much too conscious of my responsibilities."

There was a short silence. I liked less and less the way Ann was conducting the interview.

"I'm sorry," she said in the voice of one who was obviously nothing of the kind. "But I felt bound to come to you. It was only natural."

Mademoiselle Vallier shook her head with a gentle, puzzled air.

"One tries everything," she murmured.

She broke off. A sound had come suddenly from near at hand. It brought Ann swiftly to her feet. It was the sound of a child, a happy child, laughing at the top of his voice. It came apparently from upstairs.

Ann moved swiftly in the direction of the door, but Mademoiselle Vallier was too quick for her. Stepping lightly, but rapidly, she intercepted Ann almost before she was halfway across the room.

"What are you doing, Miss Winspeare?" she asked. "That is my little nephew, who has been staying with me for the last few weeks."

"I am sorry," said Ann bluntly. "But I don't believe you. Please have the goodness to let me see him."

I rose uneasily to my feet. This was pretty bad. If Ann's suspicions were correct, we had walked right into the parlour, and if, likely as not, they were unjustified, she was getting herself into an unpleasantly false position. In any case, here were two furious women between whom intervention might at any moment become necessary.

Mademoiselle Vallier, however, was not turning a hair. Her hand was resting sweetly but firmly upon Ann's shoulder.

"My dear Miss Winspeare," she said, "I quite understand. You are thoroughly upset."

I hastened to seize the occasion. Whether Ann was right or wrong, it was obvious that our best course was to get away. If Peter was in that house, so were his keepers, and we were in no trim to deal with them. Ann, herself, I could see, was thinking hard, and doubtless her ideas were taking the same direction.

"My cousin is, as you say, thoroughly upset," I said.

"Ann, dear," I continued hastily, seeing she was about to speak again, "I think we might go now. Obviously Mademoiselle Vallier cannot tell us anything about the

disappearance of the King. She has been very kind, and we really ought not to keep her any longer."

Mademoiselle Vallier looked at me gratefully.

"Thank you, Mr. Baxter," she said. "But I do not wish to drive you away. I was even hoping that you would dine with me."

Ann hesitated for just a moment. Then, smilingly, she shook her head.

"No, thank you," she said. "I'm not, as you see, fit company for any one at present. Come, John. We will be going."

She moved to the door as she spoke, and I thankfully made haste to follow her. We walked into the hall, Mademoiselle Vallier following close behind us. We had reached a settle not far from the door into the street, and I was leaning forward to pick up my hat, when Ann moved suddenly to the right, and, without a word, sped upstairs, making, as we instantly guessed, for the room from which we had heard the laughing child.

Her sudden action took us both by surprise, but Mademoiselle Vallier recovered quicker than I. She slipped after Ann very neatly and not apparently in the least confused. Ann had already disappeared round the bend of the spiral staircase and, before I was ready to follow, her pursuer had also vanished. I sprang forward and at once fell headlong on the floor and found myself staring into the jaws of a large white bear, the cause of my disaster, whose skin lay spread beneath me. I rose to my feet a little dizzy from the shock.

No sound came from the floor above, but as I started to climb the spiral, I heard what seemed like the closing of a door. I got as quickly to the top as I could, but found it necessary to hold on to the steel railing of the staircase for I had been more shaken by my fall than I realised. At the top of the stairs was a landing where I was con-

fronted with four doors, all of exactly the same pattern, all closed and betraying nothing of what might be happening on the other side.

Leaning on the bannisters, I looked at the four doors vacantly. There was nothing to choose between them.

"Well," said I to myself, "here goes."

I crossed the landing and turned the handle of the door immediately in front of me, a rather heavy affair in polished walnut. I pushed it open and found myself in a room painted entirely green, with low green seats and a green Venetian chandelier hanging from the ceiling. The room was empty.

I turned hastily to leave it, but as I did so I heard a faint click. The door had closed of itself behind me. I grasped the handle, which turned easily in my hand—too easily, for it seemed that the catch was broken and the knob went round meeting with no resistance. I shook and twisted the handle, but to no purpose. I was hopelessly, absurdly imprisoned.

I stepped back and debated whether I should throw myself against it. Again I grasped the handle and turned it; then, in a sudden passion, my nerves being on edge, I suppose, flung myself against the sullen panel, giving my shoulder a nasty jar and convincing myself that it would take two or three times the man I was to deal with the door in that fashion. In books, I reflected bitterly, doors were easily broken open. You just put your shoulder into the business, and it was done. Doors in real life were rather more stubborn. Short of using a heavy piece of furniture as a battering ram, I saw no means of getting out of the trap into which I had so carelessly hurried.

By this time I was in a fever of excitement and dismay. What was happening to Ann? Her sudden dash for the stairs had brought disaster. There had been nothing suspicious in the behaviour of Mademoiselle Vallier from

first to last. Her swift pursuit of Ann had been only natural in the circumstances. Ann's conduct, if her hostess was innocent, must have seemed entirely mad.

I prowled round the room, looked down from a high window to the street below where the hired car was still waiting and finally renewed my attack upon the door.

This time it opened immediately, and I staggered into the arms of the butler.

"All my excuses, Monsieur," he said. "I am desolated that Monsieur should have been deranged. Monsieur was looking for the lady perhaps? The lock of this door is broken, so that from the inside it will not open."

I looked at him, not a little confused by his sudden appearance.

"Where," I stammered, "is the young lady who was with me?"

"Would Monsieur please come down to the drawing-room?" he answered smoothly.

I followed the man obediently downstairs.

In the drawing-room Mademoiselle Vallier was awaiting me. She was standing by the fireplace and came forward to meet me as I entered with a charming smile. Undoubtedly she had once been beautiful. Even now — But I am digressing.

"Mr. Baxter," she said, "we were beginning to wonder what had become of you."

"Where is my cousin?" I began.

"Naturally," said Mademoiselle Vallier, "you are anxious. You can see for yourself that she is thoroughly upset. Any one else might have been hurt at her suspicions, but she is hardly, at the moment, responsible. Her nerves are all to pieces."

"Where is my cousin?" I repeated stubbornly.

"She is going to stay with me," said Mademoiselle Vallier. "I have insisted that she shall lie down and I propose

to take her up 'something on a tray' as they say in England. She really is not fit for anything at the moment."

"Can I see her?" I asked.

Mademoiselle Vallier smiled.

"You are very indiscreet," she murmured. "She is half-way to bed by now."

I looked at her in dismay. Certainly this woman had an answer for everything. She noted my confusion, shook her head at me in gentle reproof and added kindly, "I'll tell you what I'll do. You shall come upstairs with me and you shall speak to your cousin. That will set your mind at rest."

I followed her from the room and climbed the spiral stairs. In another moment we stood outside one of the four walnut doors to the right of that which I had so indiscreetly entered twenty minutes ago. Mademoiselle Vallier knocked gently on the panel.

"May we come in?" she asked.

There came an exclamation from Ann on the other side; then a short pause.

"No," she said at last. "I'm really not fit to be seen."

"Are you all right, Ann?" It was I who spoke.

"Yes, John," she said.

"Can't I see you for just a moment?"

"I'd rather you didn't, John. I'm quite all right. Mademoiselle Vallier has asked me to stay with her to-night. She is going to help me when I am feeling a little better. My suspicions were all wrong. It really was her nephew whom we heard downstairs. Go to your appointment, John, and please don't be anxious on my account."

I looked at Mademoiselle Vallier.

"Mr. Baxter," she said, kindly but firmly, "I really don't think you ought to worry your cousin any further to-night. Call and see us any time you like. Or perhaps I could send you a message?"

"Good night, Ann," I called through the door.

"Good night, John," she said.

I turned and followed Mademoiselle Vallier down the spiral stairs. The butler was waiting in the hall.

I turned to Mademoiselle Vallier.

"We owe you an apology," I began.

"Please," she entreated. "I quite understand."

A moment later I was in the street, and the door of the little house closed softly behind me.

CHAPTER VII

I PASS A RESTLESS NIGHT

I walked down the steps towards the hired car. Was Mademoiselle Vallier watching me from the window? The tail was far from vertical. I had, in fact, been cast out, first by Ann, and finally, though most politely, by Mademoiselle Vallier.

But what could I have done? After all, there had really been nothing to go upon. Ann did not like Mademoiselle Vallier, but that was not evidence. Mademoiselle Vallier was still sufficiently attractive to be disliked for no other reason by one of her own sex. It was clearly impossible that an ex-governess, well provided though she apparently was, could plan and carry out the abduction from a Continental express of a passenger travelling with a special escort. There remained only the hypothesis that Mademoiselle Vallier had been assisted by the Five Flamboys, and of that there was no indication whatever.

And yet I felt uneasily that something was wrong. And wouldn't you have felt the same in my place? Though I hadn't a shred of evidence, I was going to take no risks. I, at least, was free and would use my freedom to the best advantage. Before meeting Gaylor I would go to the police, in order to test the statement of Mademoiselle Vallier.

I accordingly roused the driver of the hired car, who was dozing over the wheel, and was conveyed to the head police station in Lausanne. There I had a piece of luck, for I found the officer whose acquaintance I had made at Vallorbe. He informed me that the police had, of course,

at once turned their attention to Mademoiselle Vallier, whose connection with the King of Roumania was well-known. They had searched her house and found nothing of a suspicious nature. There had been, in fact, a small boy on the premises, who was undoubtedly her nephew. So much for that.

On leaving the police station, I looked at my watch. It was nearly ten o'clock, and I realised that I was uncommonly hungry.

I had paid off the hired car on arriving at the police headquarters, and reminded the *patron* again of the instructions I had given his assistant at Morges to the effect that he was to leave my own car in the road beside the garage where I might be able to pick it up after midnight.

I walked to a restaurant in the Place St. François which he had recommended. There I ordered a grilled steak, and washed it down with two *canettes* of light Swiss beer. My state of mind was curious. I can best describe it as one of mild expectancy. What next? That was how things were beginning to present themselves.

I quite understand why the Germans are a nation of philosophers. Beer tends to make a man sententious. It is amazing, I reflected solemnly, how easily the mind adapts itself. I finished a third *canette* and gazed at my reflection in the mirror on the opposite wall.

"This," I said gravely, "is that transvaluation of all values of which Nietzsche speaks."

"*Encore une canette?*" asked a waiter who had suddenly appeared at my elbow.

"Yes," I said from habit.

"No," I added swiftly.

More beer was inadvisable. I was to meet Gaylor very shortly and Gaylor is not a philosopher. Metaphysics, according to him, was like looking in a dark room for a bowler hat which wasn't there.

But the fact remained. My way of life had changed and I had somehow ceased to be sufficiently surprised. A few days ago I had been just an ordinary official of the League, to whom even the most burning questions of the day were merely so much matter for minutes and reports, taking my pleasures in the orthodox way, with a round of golf on Saturday and Sunday, skiing when the weather permitted, bathing now and then in the lake, dining happily enough in my own circle of friends, taking my annual leave when I could get it with my family at home in England. But all that seemed now to be out of focus. In the space of forty-eight hours I had come upon a murder, talked with the Chief Commissioner at Scotland Yard, connived at an incredibly audacious impersonation, travelled very near to a King who had since been abducted, come into close and painful contact with a girl who had been much in my thoughts for the last two years, and peeped beneath the mask of a Balkan diplomat. And now I was shortly to meet a train in the company of the British Vice Consul at Geneva, who would hand me a packet of papers for the Prime Minister of Roumania. And the papers were themselves as fantastic as their delivery — plans of a secret well, for which one man, at least, had already died, and a queer *dossier* telling of that man's surprising resurrection and the perilous adventure of Colonel Granby, with myself, if you please, for a go-between.

I nodded gravely at my reflection in the mirror.

"Yes," I repeated, "this is the transvaluation of all values."

At eleven o'clock I left the restaurant and walked down the hill to the station. Far below twinkled the lights of Ouchy. In the station yard I found Gaylor in his open Fiat, already awaiting me. It was a warm summer night, but there was perhaps the slightest touch of autumn in the

air, and Gaylor, who has to be careful of his lungs, was muffled in a big overcoat. I looked, as always, with affection and some anxiety at his slight figure, his thin face and burning eyes. Gaylor is one of my oldest friends. Ten years my senior, he had been through the war, where he had won the Military Cross and paid for it with a game leg and a constitution wrecked with rheumatism and phosgene gas. But the war which had ruined him physically had not touched his spirit.

To-night he was especially cheerful and naturally rather curious about my present mission. I did not feel free to tell him very much. So I merely informed him that Radulara, staying at the *château* of the banker, Monsieur Gemusier, near Morges, urgently required his dispatches, and had asked me to obtain them for him before the bag was distributed in the ordinary way.

Together we paced the platform, talking of this and that. Incidentally, I told him of the breakdown of my car and of the fact that it would be waiting for me in the road at Morges.

Anon we were approached by a resplendent railway official, wearing a red cap with gold braid on it. He informed us that the Orient Express would be at least two hours late.

"Well," said Gaylor, "there is nothing to be done but see the sights of the town."

Lausanne is inhabited chiefly by doctors and schools for the young, and by midnight the only refuge for a stranger is the station buffet, where we finally settled down and ordered some beer. I sternly suppressed the metaphysical impulse, and we played a hand or two of piquet to while away the time.

At last the Orient was announced. We walked to the platform and almost before the train had come to a standstill Gaylor was beside the compartment of the King's

Messenger. I waited in the background while he took delivery of the bag and chatted a moment with the man in charge of it. The train started again in a minute or two, and Gaylor came towards me.

Together we moved to the barrier. Here there was a slight delay, as Gaylor had to show his pass, authorising him as Vice Consul to have access to the platform. He put the bag down between us as he produced his papers. As he did so a cloud of light blue smoke drifted towards us. It came from the bowl of a pipe protruding from the mouth of a nondescript individual, dressed in station overalls, with a dirty face and a big cap. He was smoking so vicious a blend of tobacco that first Gaylor, who is easily susceptible, and then myself, was seized with a fit of sneezing and coughing which called for a vigorous and prompt application of the pocket handkerchief.

"What filthy stuff," I said, between paroxysms.

Gaylor, with a purple face, jerked his head in agreement. We had picked up the bag and passed the barrier when I became aware of two men in uniform beside us. A second glance showed me that they were wearing the livery of Aspaleia — dark blue with steel buttons at the cuff and a neat round cap upon their heads. One of them approached me and saluted. The man's face seemed vaguely familiar.

"Excuse me, Monsieur," he said, "but you are in charge of some papers, I believe, for Monsieur Radulara."

My eyebrows went up at that.

"Well?" I said.

Gaylor had again set down the bag and was lost in a further paroxysm of sneezing.

"His Excellency," continued the man in uniform, "is most anxious that the papers should reach him in safety. He has sent us to act as escort."

I looked at the man carefully.

"I have seen you before," I said.

"Very probably," replied the man. "I am in constant attendance upon His Excellency."

"Of course," I said, for I now recognised the agent of Aspaleia whom I had seen only that morning on duty in the corridor outside Radulara's room at the Bergues.

"Well?" I asked. "How do you propose to help us?"

"We have a motor cycle and side car," said the second man who had not hitherto spoken. "We will precede Monsieur, if he is driving towards Geneva."

I turned to Gaylor who had now recovered from his fit of coughing and was carrying the bag. Gaylor shook his head and looked at the man shrewdly.

"That doesn't strike me as a very sensible arrangement," he observed. "If you really want to keep an eye upon us and be of use in an emergency, you'd better follow in our tracks. What's the point of it, anyway?"

"His Excellency's orders," said the man. "The papers are of the utmost importance."

"Look here, Baxter," said Gaylor to me. "Are we carrying the crown jewels of Roumania, or what is it?"

We were by this time in the station yard again. Gaylor and I climbed into his Fiat, and I put the bag between my knees. As we started off, a splutter and a backfire behind us indicated that the two men from Aspaleia were carrying out their instructions. We turned down from the station and passed by way of Ouchy to the Geneva road.

Gaylor turned to me as we cleared the town.

"Are these papers in the bag really as important as all that?" he asked.

"You may take it that they are," I answered.

"Is anybody except Radulara likely to be interested in them?"

"Quite a number of people," I observed.

"How goes the escort?" he inquired.

"Still following," I said with a glance behind.

"You recognised one of them, it seems?"

"I did. He was on sentry go outside Radulara's bath-room when I saw him last."

"Do you feel quite happy about them?" he persisted.

"I suppose they're all right," I answered dubiously.

"It's just like Radulara to have sent an escort."

"Did he tell you he was going to do so?"

"No."

"That's rather strange."

Gaylor was silent a moment.

"Well," he said at last. "We shall know pretty soon."

I glanced at him uneasily and he answered my look with a sceptical lift of the eyebrow.

"They may be all right," he said. "But I don't like the look of your friends and I'm pretty good at faces. Anyhow, I don't propose to take any risks and, if they are not the nice kind chaps they seem to be, we've got a pretty little surprise in store for them."

"When I change cars at Morges, you mean?"

"Exactly. They won't know whether to follow you to Gemusier's villa or me to Geneva, and we won't give them any time for reflection."

He slipped his hand into his pocket as he spoke, and produced a small key. "I suggest you unlock the bag. Take out the papers for Radulara. Then, when we get to Morges, you can hop into your own car and get away before they realise what is happening."

I took the key, found the lock of the canvas bag with its seals and its bright official air, tried it once and then again.

"This key does not fit," I said at last.

"Nonsense," said Gaylord. "Try again."

I did so, but without effect.

"I am sorry," I said. "But the key is an obvious misfit."

"Are you quite sure?" he demanded, slowing down the

car a little. "Hold the lock right under the dash board and have another shot."

I had another shot and yet another, but there was nothing to be done. I looked at Gaylor, whose face was now rather stern and puzzled.

I returned him the key, and he examined it, driving with one hand as he did so.

"It's the right key," he said at last.

Then he added suddenly:

"Have you got a knife?"

"Yes," I said.

"Cut the bag open," he snapped.

"Cut the bag?" I echoed.

"Yes," he said.

"But look here," I began.

"Cut it open," he snapped again.

I thrust the blade of my knife obediently into the canvas, slashed it violently, pushed my hand through the slit, encountered what felt like a book and pulled it out of the bag.

"'Nicholas Nickleby,'" I exclaimed.

"Don't swear," said Gaylor.

"I'm not swearing," I protested feebly. "I'm holding in my hand a Tauchnitz edition of 'Nicholas Nickleby.'"

I thrust the book under his nose with the result that the car swerved alarmingly.

"Try again," he said.

I dived again into the bag.

"Here you are," I said. "'Oliver Twist' — 'Little Dorrit' — 'Martin Chuzzlewit' — 'Barnaby Rudge.'"

"Enough," said Gaylor. "I told you I didn't like their faces."

"I don't understand this," I muttered.

"You say that the dispatches are important," said Gaylor.

"I've no time to say how important," I said, "and I'm hardly free to do so. But I can tell you this: If they fall into the wrong hands Radulara's number is up as Prime Minister of Roumania."

There I stopped, for I was struck by a devastating thought. What could this be but the work of the Flamboys? These dispatches would not only give them the plans of the well, but, what was far more serious, the information that Angus McGuffie was no longer Angus McGuffie, but Colonel Alistair Granby—of the Secret Intelligence.

"Are you thinking, Baxter?" asked Gaylor, his voice breaking in upon these pleasant reflections.

"I'm doing my best," I said.

"You perceive now why those fellows wanted to go in front?"

"No," I said.

"They've got the bag," he rejoined. "They planted this dummy on us in the station square."

"Then why don't they make off with it instead of following at our heels?" I asked.

We were flashing past a series of tall poplars, motionless and menacing, with the stars caught in their slim branches.

"They're taking the bag to Geneva, I suppose, and this is the only road. They must either go in front or follow us. They've got the bag safely tucked away in the nose of their side car and will give us the slip as soon as they can without arousing suspicion. That is the position, Baxter. Meanwhile, we run quietly into Geneva and present His Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs with the immortal works of Charles Dickens."

He broke off and I heard a sound that surprised me considerably. Gaylor was chuckling.

"It's a pretty fair to-do," he said. "There must be

some one in this business with a sense of humour. Unfortunately, there is probably a good deal else besides — including those two stalwart ruffians in the outfit behind us."

He chuckled again and then broke into a violent fit of coughing.

"By Jove," I exclaimed. "I see now how it was done. That fellow with the pipe."

"You've hit it, Baxter. He was smoking Number A 1 Sneezing Mixture. And there was I, dropping that precious bag all over the platform surrounded by a picked company of brief snatchers. Got a gun?"

"No," I replied.

Gaylor groaned.

"Nothing more lethal than a spanner between us," he complained. "Is the enemy still in sight?"

"He is," I said, after a quick look to the rear.

Even at that moment I had leisure to be astonished at Gaylor. The life of a Vice Consul at Geneva is scarcely a preparation for the sort of position in which we found ourselves. I was too young to have had any part in the war and apt to forget that Gaylor had only too good reason to remember it.

"Well, Baxter," he said, "what is to be the next move? They've got the bag and at any moment they may decide to take to the byroads. The police, who are always so thick on the road to catch perfectly harmless motorists on Sunday afternoon, are most unlikely to put in an appearance here and now. When we get to your car at Morges they will pass us, and, if we bar the way, they are more than likely to become extremely violent, and I'm afraid I'm no longer the man I was when it comes to that sort of thing."

"We know where the bag is," I said, "but they don't know that we know. Surprise is nine points of the war."

We were both of us silent a moment. Then Gaylor suddenly brought his hand down with a resounding smack on my thigh.

"I've got it," he said.

The car for a moment was fanciful, and, when the driver had more or less regained control, I inquired bitterly what he had got, in addition to my thigh, which he was gripping like a vise.

I listened in silence while he rapidly sketched a plan which could only have come from a man of violent disposition.

"It all depends," I said a little dubiously.

"It usually does," said Gaylor.

"But there are so many things," I objected. "Is my car standing in the road as I asked them to leave it? Is it pointing to Geneva? Is it ready to start without any tickling? Will the other fellows pull up sufficiently near?"

"And so on and so forth," said Gaylor. "I admit that there are half a dozen ways in which the plan may go wrong. But I can't think of another, and if we do nothing at all it will be your pleasant duty to present His Excellency Radulara with 'The Cricket on the Hearth' or something equally exciting. He may, of course, be partial to Dickens. One never knows."

I thought again.

"It's a big risk," I pointed out.

"It is," said Gaylor.

"We may kill the fellows," I said.

"We may," responded Gaylor.

I looked at the luminous dial of my watch.

"Half-past two," I said.

"Later than I thought," replied Gaylor. "It will be light by four, but we shall be at Morges in about ten minutes. Meanwhile, would you kindly run over the plan with me again. This little piece needs careful rehearsing."

In five minutes we had settled everything to the smallest detail. After that we were silent. My brain was on fire, and my fingers had gone cold. The car sped on its way. On our left, separated from us by the invisible fields, lay the lake, in which the quiet stars were reflected, for the moon had set and the night was dark. In the farthest distance I could see the sharp outlines of the mountains of Savoy, or was it imagination? Could I only see them because I knew they were there? And, by the roadside, were the rows of vines, heavy with grapes soon to be crushed into wine amidst jollity and feasting.

Then, with a catch of the breath, I saw, ahead of us, the lights of Morges.

We ran slowly through the little eighteenth-century town.

"The garage," I whispered, "is at the further end of the street."

"Whisper it not," said Gaylor, with a lilt in his voice. "You're tickling my ear."

It was then that I saw my car drawn up as I had directed by the side of the road.

"There she is," I said, pointing through the darkness.

"Good," said Gaylor. "How far behind are our friends?"

I looked over my shoulder.

"About fifty yards," I said.

"Good," repeated Gaylor.

He pushed out the clutch, put the gears into neutral and ran free for the remainder of the distance towards the car. The only sound in the summer night came now from the motor cycle behind us.

Gaylor began to put on his brakes, and at the same time I put out my hand as a signal that we were stopping. Looking back I could see the motor cycle obediently slow down, and a moment later we glided abreast of my own car.

"Thank God," I whispered. "It's pointing in the right direction."

True enough it was headed for Geneva.

"Stand by, old boy," said Gaylor, "and good luck to you."

He came to a standstill as he spoke, exactly beside my own car, so that the two of them blocked the road completely. With a grinding of brakes the motor cycle drew up some ten yards behind us, making the night hideous with its panting. I got slowly out of Gaylord's car and walked towards the combination. Gaylor remained at the wheel, looking back at me. His engine was still running.

I stopped a moment, produced my cigarette case, opened it, deliberately took out a cigarette and put it in my mouth. Then I patted myself all over as though feeling for matches. I was now quite close to the motor cycle and, getting in front of it, I leaned across so as to obscure the view of the man in the side car and spoke to the man in the saddle.

"Have you got a match?" I asked.

The man was looking at me intently.

"This is where I change cars," I said as evenly as possible.

"Matches, Monsieur?" said the man and put his hand in his pocket.

Suddenly I stepped to one side.

"Look out," I shouted in French, "there's another car coming. Look out, Gaylor."

My shout was the pre-arranged signal, and Gaylor's car shot suddenly backwards. He had slipped the gear lever into reverse and the Fiat came back upon us like a thunderbolt. There was a yell from the man on the motor cycle, and a moment later the rear wheel buffers of the Fiat had come into violent contact with the combination. There was a horrible crash and the front wheel of the

motor bike crumpled. The man in the side car put one foot to the ground and tried to alight. The man in the saddle, hurled into the road by the impact, appeared to be out of commission.

I stepped up to the man in the side car, and very carefully, for I was prepared, within reason, to be gentle with him, I hit him on the jaw, so that he collapsed over the rim of the motor cycle. Then, diving into the nose of the side car I found the bag, pulled it out and ran swiftly for my own car. All had gone according to programme. I jumped to the wheel and pressed the starter. The engine leapt to life and I put my foot on the accelerator. The car moved forward.

I had now only one anxiety. Was Gaylor all right or had he damaged his car? My orders were in any case to get away with the bag. I ran a hundred yards or so down the road, till I came to the turning to the right which would take me to the country house of Monsieur Gemusier. The road at this point was narrow and twisting, and I had to go slowly. Cautiously I looked back, and was suddenly blinded by the lights of Gaylor's car coming round the bend which I had just negotiated.

We had pulled it off. Our plan had succeeded in every detail. Gaylor, excellent fellow, was coming up behind. I took at once the turning to the right and ran on happily for half a mile or so, looking back every now and then. Gaylor was following me pretty closely and I waved my hand to him gaily over the side to show that all was well with the world. His reply was unexpected. There came a sudden, sharp report from the rear.

"Punctured, by George," I murmured. "Perhaps I ought to stop."

I looked round again and almost at once I heard another loud report.

"Hullo," I said, a little dashed, "this is odd."

Then, suddenly, my eye coming round again to the wheel, caught sight of the petrol gauge on the dashboard, a little tube of red fluid which showed the amount of petrol in the tank. I stared at it in dismay. My consumption had increased abruptly from twenty miles to the gallon to something like two yards.

Once more I looked back, and what I saw was odd indeed. The man at the wheel of Gaylor's car was not Gaylor. Nor was Gaylor the man who sat beside him with a pistol in his hand. On the back seat of the car was a dim unpleasant heap. That, probably, was Gaylor.

I looked back at the gauge, and realised what had happened. The man with the pistol had hit my petrol tank and soon my own car would be useless.

Savagely I trod on the accelerator. My car bounded forward. I would, at least, go as far as I could before the inevitable happened. I drew rapidly away from them, but a minute later a splutter from the carburettor showed me that the petrol supply was almost out.

I stopped the car, for I had no intention of being taken on the road. I opened the door, jumped out and took to the fields on the right, slinging the precious bag that had caused so much trouble, across my shoulder as I ran. I struck plough after twenty yards and staggered laboriously over the heavy ground. Dawn was just appearing and already the trees and vines were taking shape and colour.

Never was triumph so rudely dashed. A few moments ago our success had seemed complete. Now the tables were turned. I could hardly hope to escape over the fields, unarmed and heavily laden.

I hoped that they would shoot, if shoot they must, at my legs rather than at my body. It was far from pleasant I can assure you, toiling over the plough, with the thought that I might get a bullet through the back at any minute.

Were there, I wondered, no houses or inhabitants in this God-forsaken country? The question was no sooner asked than answered, for with a glimmer of hope, I suddenly perceived the outlines of a substantial farmhouse, a hundred yards or so away. Possibly I might reach it, rouse the inhabitants and ask for aid. I began to compose suitable sentences in French. *I am pursued. There are assassins who follow me. Will you not give me of your assistance?*

I had crossed the plough and stumbling over a short piece of grass found myself beside a low stone wall about five feet high, apparently surrounding a midden. One side of this enclosure was formed by the wall of a barn. I ran round the angle of the wall and stumbled heavily over a large pitchfork. Having turned the angle of the wall I was no longer within sight of my pursuers. I staggered on another ten yards or so, when I came to a gate in the wall. On it in rough letters was painted a notice: *Attention au Taureau*, or, in plain English, "Beware of the Bull." Looking through the gate I saw the animal in question, lying just on the further side of the gate. In the grey morning light he appeared enormous, a very mountain of a bull and the slow movement of his lower jaw showed me that he was awake.

The bull in the yard gave me a sudden wild idea.

I ran back, retrieved the pitchfork over which I had stumbled, returned to the gate, pushed it open, and crept into the yard. The bull with a small red eye, watched my proceedings with curiosity, which I felt would change to suspicion at any moment. I slipped over quickly to the barn, jumped upon the wall of the enclosure and climbed to the roof. I was now safe from the bull, and, lying flat, could keep an eye on my pursuers.

They were further off than I thought. Evidently the plough had been as difficult for them as it had been for

me. Upon the edge of it they paused, uncertain of my whereabouts, and one of them pointed towards the yard. Cautiously they approached the wall and moved towards the gate. I allowed them to get within about twenty yards of it when I slipped from the roof of the barn and approached the bull from behind. My pursuers were now framed in the open gateway. This clearly was the moment. I laid down the precious bag and, bethinking myself of the counsel of King David, I raised the pitchfork and smote the bull upon the hinder part, putting him to perpetual shame.

With a roar of pain and fury he scrambled heavily to his feet and charged instantly at the only open space he could see, which was precisely that occupied by my two pursuers.

CHAPTER VIII

I BREAKFAST OFF BRANDY AND BLACK VELVET

I did not stay to witness their discomfiture, but catching up the bag, vaulted over the wall and ran as fast as I could down the hill towards the stretch of plough over which I had toiled so painfully a few minutes before. I glanced back once or twice to see what was happening. The bull, I was glad to note, was running at right angles to myself, and one of my pursuers was in the grip of an infuriated farmer who, in the early morning light, seemed the size of a giant. Frequent detonations in the Vaudois dialect indicated that my exploit with the pitchfork was being placed to the credit of my enemies.

I hastened down the hill towards the road, beginning to feel rather better pleased with life, and soon came within sight of my derelict car. The Fiat was drawn up just behind it close to the hedge.

I looked at once for Gaylor. He was lying face downwards on the back seat, and I turned him over, feeling curiously sick.

"No blood," I muttered.

I could see that he had received a nasty blow on the head, but his breathing was normal. I arranged him a little more comfortably and scrambled to the wheel. I decided to drive at once to the house of Monsieur Gemusier where I should, if necessary, be able to get a doctor. It was pretty rough going and I dared not drive too slowly having too much respect for my enemies, who were clearly,

like the Parsee, men of infinite resource and sagacity. At the end of a few minutes I heard a groan and felt a shaky hand upon my shoulder. I looked back and there was Gaylor kneeling on the floor of the car, his face very white, leaning over the seat.

"Hullo, old man," I said. "Glad to see you. How are you feeling?"

"Don't worry about me," he replied. "Get on with the job."

"Sure?" I said, slowing down the car as I spoke.

"Quite sure," he said fiercely into my ear. "The air is doing me good. But where's the enemy?"

I told him what had happened in a series of verbal jerks as I thrust the car along. Gaylor was giggling weakly. Then suddenly he tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the left.

"That must be the house," he said.

I looked in the direction indicated and saw, through some fine trees, a grey eighteenth-century country house, very perfect, standing at ease upon a high lawn, with the quiet dignity of the Augustans. A long drive ran up to the house, and Château Fleuri was written on two tall pillars beside the road.

I turned left-handed and ran the car up the drive. A glance at my wrist watch showed me that it was half-past five. Then I inspected Gaylor. He looked as though he might faint again at any moment. It was clearly no time for ceremony.

I left the car and approached the house. The door stood open and on the threshold, as I advanced, a housemaid conveniently appeared, bearing a couple of rugs and the straw flail with which Swiss servants are accustomed to disturb the slumbers of those who leave their beds at a reasonable hour. She looked at me in mild surprise and from me to the ghastly figure of Gaylor in the car. She

dropped the rugs on the stone steps and pointed the flail dramatically at Gaylor.

"There has been an accident?" she said.

"I wish to speak at once with Monsieur Gemusier," I replied. "I have an important message for him. Also this gentleman is in need of assistance."

The girl turned swiftly and disappeared up a shallow flight of stairs. I waited a moment in the hall, but almost immediately a man appeared on the landing above. He descended slowly and with dignity, tucking the ends of a nightshirt into a pair of trousers as he came. He met me in the hall with a grave solicitude. This was evidently the butler.

"*Monsieur désire?*" he asked.

Thrusting a hand into my pocket I drew out the long envelope covered with red seals which I had, during his descent, extracted from the diplomatic bag, while the butler caressed, with an unfaltering hand, a left side whisker which had been deranged by long and intimate contact with a pillow.

"You see to whom this is addressed?" I said, rapidly. "It is an important dispatch for His Excellency the Prime Minister of Roumania. I would ask you to conduct me to him immediately."

The butler gazed at me stolidly. This was not a man to be hurried. His gaze wandered from me to the car outside where Gaylor was looking over the edge of the door.

"That," I said, following his gaze, "is Monsieur Gaylor, the British Vice Consul at Geneva."

"There has been an accident?" he said.

Without a word he drew from his left-hand trouser pocket, at the end of a steel chain, a bunch of keys. Selecting one of them he slipped it from the ring and handed it to the maidservant who stood respectfully beside him.

"The cupboard in the pantry," he said briefly. "Bin

Number Five. Tell Jules to conduct the gentleman in the car to the smoking room."

The maid sped to do his bidding, while the butler with a gentle motion of the hand, invited me to follow him up the broad stairs.

We moved down a long corridor which ran the whole length of the house, till we stood opposite a white painted door set in beautiful mouldings. The butler raised his hand, but paused a moment, and I became aware of curiously rhythmical sounds proceeding from the room beyond. The butler discreetly tapped upon the panel. The noises within ceased abruptly.

"*Entrez*," said a voice.

The butler opened the door a few inches.

"There is a gentleman," he began.

But by this time the adventures of the night and my suppressed excitement became too much for me. I pushed the butler aside.

"Pray pardon me," I said. "It is to Monsieur Gemusier that I address myself?"

The man to whom I spoke was large and florid, clad in silk pyjamas of a lemon shade. The origin of the mysterious sounds was now apparent. Twisted rubber cords with shining handles lay, like a tired octopus, on the floor. I had disturbed Monsieur Gemusier at his morning exercises.

Scarcely giving him time for reply to my question, I produced the envelope with the red seals.

"For the Prime Minister of Roumania," I said. "The train was late. There were difficulties."

Monsieur Gemusier nodded.

"Come with me, Monsieur," he said.

Moving past the butler who, with an impressive gesture, threw the door wide open as we approached it, we went

down the corridor till we stood outside another white door.

Monsieur Gemusier knocked.

A high-pitched querulous voice, which I instantly recognised, bade us to enter. I followed on the heels of the banker, but recoiled instinctively, being met with a blast of air solid with heat and exotic perfume.

"And all the Orient laugheth of the light," I murmured to myself. For the early sunshine shone upon a curious spectacle. Every window was closed, despite the fact that it had been a warm night and would be a warmer day. His Excellency lay cowering beneath an enormous pile of bed-clothes, surmounted by two large white eiderdowns of the type met with in France, Germany or Switzerland. There was a convulsive agitation of this monstrous erection as we approached the bed, and a thin foot encased in a white woollen bedsock shot out. His Excellency stretched himself and a huge hot-water bottle of red rubber, thrust over the edge of the bed, fell with a loud plop upon the parquet floor. The protruding leg was shrouded in pyjamas of the thickest camel hair wool, a close fitting nightcap of white fur adorned the head of the Prime Minister from beneath which his little eyes gleamed as "doon the sterres in a frosty night."

The eyes were cold, the only cold things in the room.

"This is Your Excellency's messenger," said Monsieur Gemusier.

The contrast between the florid man in his thin silk pyjamas and the huddled figure in the bed was remarkable. Radulara raised himself on one elbow and thrust out a lean hand for the dispatches. Contrary to my expectations it was not encased in a woollen glove.

"You came, then, at last," he said petulantly. "I expected you hours ago."

"There have been difficulties, Excellency," I replied.

"The train was late, and I was attacked on the road."

But Radulara was not listening. He had seized greedily upon the large envelope covered with red seals which I had taken from the bag, broken it open, and was rapidly looking through its contents.

"Here you are, Gemusier," he said, waving me impetuously aside. "This is the information you need, together with the plans of the well. We will examine them together."

He thrust at Gemusier a handful of blue sheets, that looked like engineers' drawings, and a wad of typewritten material. Gemusier took them from his hand and sat on the bed beside him.

Radulara turned to me.

"I will see you presently," he said.

I bowed stiffly. This was hardly the way to receive a man who had only just missed being slain on your behalf. I was not, however, sorry to be dismissed, for I was still feeling anxious about Gaylor.

"Do you wish me to wait here, Excellency?" I asked.

"Why should you do that?" he asked. "I'm returning to Geneva this morning and will communicate with you when and if it is necessary. I will read the dispatches concerning Colonel Granby and if I desire to get into touch with him I will let you know."

"Thank you, Excellency," I said drily.

There was a rustle of papers as I left the room, and I heard the high querulous voice of Radulara.

"It is even better than I thought," he was saying. "The output is tremendous. Look at these figures. Two hundred thousand hectolitres."

I closed the door. In the window outside the butler was waiting. I descended with him to the library and there I found Gaylor sitting up in an armchair and looking a little better.

"It is not often that I breakfast on brandy," he said, "and I sha'n't make a habit of it. But I advise you for this once to follow my example."

I hastened to do so.

In ten minutes Gaylor declared himself ready for the road.

"And when we get to Geneva," I said, "you will go straight to bed."

I helped him to the car, put a warm rug about his knees, climbed in and bestowed what was left of the famous bag between his feet. We then started for Geneva.

I drove in silence, for I could see that Gaylor, although he made light of it, was in considerable pain, and when at last I drew up at his flat in the Boulevard des Tranchées and helped him into the lift, he made no secret of the fact that he was at the end of his tether. I handed him over to a motherly housekeeper who, with many exclamations, undertook to look after him.

The next half hour was spent in seeing to a number of tiresome but necessary details, for I had to deliver the bag at the Consulate and to take Gaylor's car to his garage.

I was tired but well content. Granby's secret was safe. It was still quite early, and for the moment there was nothing I could obviously do. I felt, however, that Granby, though he had as yet given no sign of his presence in Geneva, would like to know of my adventures. The information I had acquired might very possibly supplement his own, and help him in forming his plans. I, therefore, decided to go round to the Pension de la Reine.

I accordingly set out for the Quai du Mont Blanc. My way lay through the Old Town of Geneva, down the hill to the quays beside the Rhône. I felt suddenly very weary and on reaching the foot of the hill decided that support was necessary. I turned instinctively towards the only

place in Geneva where I felt sure of a welcome so early in the morning. Carlo, of the Bar Sporting, is no ordinary man. His cocktails are famous throughout the five continents and the seven seas. He is my friend in every sense. Carlo would see me through.

Thus I passed on my way, like Odysseus, revolving many thoughts. I found the night's adventures more thrilling in retrospect than they had been at the time. I, at last, had the leisure both to be frightened by the risks I had run and to admire the way in which I had successfully survived them. I wondered whether Ann was yet in active alliance with the ex-governess, and whether the bull had avenged his shame upon the men from Aspaleia.

And that reminded me of something. I must warn Radulara as soon as he considered me worthy of attention about the man whom I had seen on duty at the Bergues. The fellow was not likely to return to his duties as body-guard, but it would be well for Radulara to know that the wolf had been in the fold.

I pushed open the door of Carlo's bar in the Rue du Rhône. Carlo was at the counter enjoying his breakfast with his pretty wife, while Carlo's waiter and handy man, Charles, was sweeping the floor. Carlo came forward instantly.

"Monsieur is a little early to-day," he said. "Or is it a little late?"

"Carlo," I said, "I am tired."

I sat down heavily on one of the red leather seats of the bar. Carlo was swiftly sympathetic.

"Naturally, Monsieur," he said. "One is often tired in the morning. But Monsieur is young," he added hopefully.

"What do you recommend?" I asked.

Carlo looked at me with his head on one side in the way he has.

"A Bronx perhaps," he suggested. "A cocktail on such

occasions is unorthodox, but I have found that it works surprisingly well."

"A Bronx," I said doubtfully. "Is that the prescription?"

"Or perhaps a side car," he suggested.

"No, Carlo," I said swiftly and firmly, "not a side car. Incidentally, Carlo, I'm not suffering in the way you think I am. I have been stone-cold sober for the last forty-eight hours."

"What sadness," murmured Carlo.

"I am tired," I repeated. "Get me a couple of prairie oysters and a stoup of black velvet."

"*Bien, Monsieur,*" he replied.

I swallowed the prairie oysters, helping them on their way with a foaming tankard of champagne and stout. Then I began to feel better.

The bright reflections of the morning grew even brighter. Come to think of it, I had not done so badly. Granby would be pleased with me. I had saved his impersonation. But for me he might have been walking off that very minute to meet the Flamboys, only to be laid immediately by the heels as an imposter. The Flamboys — desperate fellows — pistols, by George.

It was still only half-past eight and hardly yet time to call on Granby. On the counter of the bar was a *Continental Daily Mail*. Sussex, I was pleased to note, was doing well against Kent, while Lancashire had dismissed Surrey for a paltry ninety-two at the Oval. I turned to the front page. Nothing there but the usual headlines. "Sensational Escape," I read, and a little lower down: "Mrs. Drake Takes Her Family for a Walk." That was better — a typically British incident complete with photograph of the duck and her progeny crossing the Mall while a policeman held up the traffic. "Son Strikes Mother-in-Law." Well, that might happen to anybody.

My eyes went back to the bigger type at the head of the page. Once more I read: "Sensational Escape," and this time my eye caught further details. "Foreign Prisoner Is Rescued from Black Maria on His Way to Court."

I read the first two paragraphs and sat back.

"Steady," I muttered, "this is impossible."

There it was, however, staring at me in cold print. A police van in which a prisoner charged with murder was being conducted to prison had been run down by a large lorry near an East London police station. In the confusion the prisoner had escaped. The name of the prisoner was given with full particulars of the offence with which he was charged. The name was Constantine Petrano, and he was indicted for the murder of Angus McGuffie of the Laurels, Freshwater, Isle of Wight.

Who was it first described the press as the Fourth Estate? The journalist who had secured that story for his editor was doubtless glowing with the virtue of his kind. He had done his duty by the public which was to give it all the news and damn the consequences. Not all the resources of Scotland Yard and the British Foreign Office might prevail against the incorruptible fanaticism of the universal informer. Gaylor and I had risked our lives to save Granby's secret. Issues of unknown importance were involved. But here it all was for the whole world to read. It now only remained for one of the Flamboys to pick up the *Continental Daily Mail* in order to discover that Angus McGuffie, who had come to Geneva to meet them, had been murdered at Freshwater two days ago.

I looked at my watch. It was a quarter to nine. Granby must be warned if he had not been warned already. I waved a hasty farewell to Carlo, jumped into a taxi, and five minutes later was demanding of one of the maids at the Pension de la Reine to be taken up to see Mr. McGuffie, without delay.

I waited for what seemed an interminable time in the awful parlour of the hotel with its rococo clock and plush chairs. Presently the maid returned.

"Monsieur has gone out," she said.

"When did he go?" I asked.

"About ten minutes ago," she answered. "He left word that he would be gone some time, but that he would be back for lunch."

"I wonder," I said to myself.

I felt as though some one had struck me over the heart and for the moment was completely bewildered. I stood there helplessly with the *Daily Mail* still in my hand. Where had Granby gone? Very probably to meet the Flamboys. And I did not know where to look for him, or how to warn him of his peril.

"Monsieur is not well?" said the maid anxiously.

"It is nothing," I stammered, and turning abruptly I ran down the stairs into the street, where I hailed another taxi and was driven to my flat in the Rue du Cloître. Perhaps he had left me a message.

"It is Monsieur," said my rather flustered and anxious housekeeper.

"It is," I answered. "Is there any message for me, Marthe?"

"But yes," said the admirable woman, "a *chasseur* of the Pension de la Reine came not ten minutes ago with this letter."

I took the envelope from her and tore it open. Inside was a note from Granby and the news was bad:

I have gone to the Villa Mont Allègre at Cologny, where our friends reside. They have summoned me to meet them at nine. Should I not return by noon to the Pension de la Reine, you must tell His Excellency that I am no longer available. Things are serious. They have, as you probably know, abducted a certain person and we shall have to act

quickly. Do not, however, make any move before midday, unless you hear from me either at your own address or at the office. Burn this.

I read it through a second time and, lighting a match, burnt it as directed.

Then I stood still a moment, thinking. What could I do? Granby when he had sent that note was obviously still relying on the fact that his impersonation of Angus McGuffie was unknown. Why had he not been warned from London? Surely, there must have been time to send one of us a telegram. I was to take no action till midday, but obviously I must disregard the instructions in the light of what I now knew.

I looked at my watch. Ten minutes to nine. Even now I might catch him before he reached the Villa Mont Allègre. At all events I must try.

I hurried from the flat, jumped into the taxi which I had fortunately not dismissed, and told the chauffeur to drive as quickly as he dared to Cologny. We ran along the south side of the lake, passed the Parc des Eaux Vives, and then turned sharp to the right, up the steep hill which leads to what is now the most fashionable suburb of Geneva, consecrated to the memory of Byron, where at the Villa Deodati he lived a hundred years ago with Shelley and Clare and the sedulous Doctor Polydore. The Villa Mont Allègre was, I discovered, almost next door.

I leaped from the taxi and told the driver to wait for me a hundred yards or so down the road. Then I turned to the villa.

It was an old house, once, I should imagine a farmhouse. But I had no eyes for architectural details, for there, with a sudden leap of the spirits, I saw standing on the doorstep the sombre form of Angus McGuffie.

His hand had just fallen from the bell, and he was waiting to be admitted.

CHAPTER IX

I CLIMB THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

I ran forward.

"Mr. McGuffie," I said urgently.

Before, however, I could reach him, the door opened and a manservant in a green apron appeared upon the threshold. The man stood aside, and Granby, who had not heard my call, entered the house. The door was closing behind me, but I was not to be baffled in that way, and I stuck my foot in the gap. There was still hope. Mr. McGuffie would have to be divested of his silk hat and overcoat before being taken to his interview. There might yet be time to whisper a single sentence of warning.

I pushed at the closing door, which swung open again immediately and disclosed the manservant.

"I have a message for the gentleman you have just admitted," I said. "It's urgent."

He gazed at me blankly and stepped aside without a word.

I slipped quickly past him and entered the hall. That was my first shock; for the hall was also a living room. Granby was within a yard of me, and some one was helping him to take off his coat. And that was my second shock, for the man helping Granby was my old travelling companion and rival, the elegant Wyndham.

Our surprise was mutual. He raised his eyebrows and stopped short, looking from me and back again to Granby, obviously inviting an explanation. At the same time I

became aware of two other men who had advanced from the other end of the room. I will describe them later. Suffice it that for the moment I was an object of interest to them all.

It was Granby who at once dealt with this shattering situation.

"Weel, laddie," he said, "what brings ye here? It's my secretary, gentlemen," he added turning to the others. "He's a sair expense to me, but I've too much work for one pair o' hands as ye may well imagine."

I stole a quick look at Wyndham. Had Ann, perhaps, told him I was a member of the Secretariat of the League? Apparently not, for he accepted Granby's assertion.

"I hardly think you will need a secretary for the present interview. Mr. McGuffie," he said smoothly.

"There you're surely right, Mr. Wyndham. Wee pitchers have long ears and this young man, I'm sorry to say, is a frequenter of bars and places where there is often a deal more talking than sense."

He turned to me again.

"Weel, laddie," he said. "What is it? Excuse me a minute, gentlemen," and he made as though he would draw me aside.

"Come, Mr. McGuffie," said Wyndham pleasantly. "Why all this mystery? You can surely have no secrets from us."

"It's a purely private matter," I began.

"Then it can wait, if you don't mind," said Wyndham.

The tone was courteous, but he was looking at us intently as he spoke.

"We'll not be detaining ye more than a nice minute," said Granby.

"I hope you will not be detaining us at all, Mr. McGuffie," said Wyndham.

Granby looked at Wyndham and, to my dismay, de-

cided not to press the matter. Doubtless he was right from his own point of view. He could not possibly guess how serious my message was, and his main concern at that moment was to avoid raising suspicion.

"Some other time, laddie," he said negligently. "I'll be seeing ye to lunch and till then ye can do as ye please. But no looking on the wine when it's golden or the painted lassies in the streets. Ye can visit the museum, and take a keek at the statue o' John Knox in the University Gardens."

The impassive manservant, who had all this time been standing by the door, opened it and stood aside. I looked hastily round at the men who were watching me. I hated to go, but I could not mistake the message in Granby's eye. He had come to the conclusion that he could not safely insist on speaking with me in private.

"Very well, sir," I said.

I turned and walked through the open door, and a moment later I was standing in the lane outside.

But I was not going to leave the old boy to plunge about in the soup alone. Should I send him a note? That was too risky, for some one else might read it.

Meanwhile, I had presumably identified one of the Flamboys, the elegant and leisurely Wyndham, whom I should never have suspected of anything more serious than a madrigal. "I hope you will not be detaining us at all, Mr. McGuffie." There had been something in his voice and manner that was far from agreeable. Steel beneath the velvet — that was just the sort of silly romantic phrase that Wyndham naturally suggested.

My decision was soon taken. I would not leave the spot till Granby was safely quit of it. My taxi was close at hand. I went up to the driver, paid him his fare and, pulling out my diary and pencil, scribbled a short note for the man to take to my chief, saying that urgent private

affairs would prevent me from reaching the office that morning. I then walked slowly back towards the Villa Mont Allègre. I had now but one idea in my head — to stand by Granby at all costs.

I carefully examined the house from behind the hedge. It was a low building, not more than two storeys in height, with a small veranda jutting from the side of it at right angles to me. In front of me was an unkempt lawn, part of an old orchard, for there were several apple trees loaded with fruit.

What was going on behind those blind walls and the shut door? Somehow, if I was to be of any real use at the critical moment I must contrive to be a witness. But how was that to be managed? It was, in any case, no use my standing there in the lane and hoping for the best. If I were to be of any use to Granby I must be on the spot, or as close as possible in the circumstances.

At that precise moment there came a sound from under the hedge beside me. It was rhythmical and at first soft and hesitant. Then suddenly it swelled in volume and filled the morning. I looked down and away to the side. In the ditch, at full length, his head comfortably propped upon a basket partially filled with apples, lay a man of some fifty summers, large and muscular, his skin burned by the sun. He was wearing a pair of corduroy trousers, gathered in at the ankle. A striped shirt of blue and white disclosed a red neck, supporting a shaggy head and a face badly in need of a shave. He was lying on his back, his hands clasped comfortably upon an ample belly. From his nose and open mouth proceeded the sound that filled the morning and the sight of a large empty bottle sticking from one of his trouser pockets showed how he had come thus early by this lethargy. He was apparently supposed to be harvesting the apples from the small orchard in front of

the house, for the basket upon which his head was reclining was half full of the rosy fruit.

I had quickly made up my mind. But could I secure the basket without waking the man? His head appeared to be pillowed upon it. On looking more closely, however, I saw that his head was not actually resting on the basket, but on a little pile of apples which had run from the edge. I stole round the hedge and cautiously removed the basket. Inside it were a pair of clippers. Then I picked up the man's coat and plaited straw hat which lay beside him. He was bigger than I was, so that I was easily able to slip his coat over my own. Cramming the straw hat on my head and picking up the basket and the clippers, I next moved cautiously through the gate and thus into the garden, or rather the orchard, of the Villa Mont Allègre.

The disguise was poor enough, but it would pass muster at a distance, and the sight of a gardener cutting apples from the trees was not one which was at all likely to attract attention.

My eye was caught by a particular tree to which the gardener had not yet devoted his attention. It was growing close to the house, within a yard, in fact, of one of the windows of the downstairs room, in which the interview between Granby and the Flamboys was, I hoped, taking place. It was heavily loaded with fruit. Taking a small ladder from one of the neighbouring trees I approached it and, being careful to make no sound, propped it against the stoutest of its boughs and soon I was well embowered in the midst of it. I was not, of course, hidden from view, but, at any rate, well engaged upon my proper task should any one happen to pass that way.

My head was now on a level with the top of the open window of the main room, and I found at once that I could both see and hear what was happening. Con-

scientiously I began to fill the basket with apples, taking care, however, to make no sound, so that attention should not be drawn to my presence.

Granby was seated at a large round table in the middle of the room. Opposite him were the two men whom I have not yet described, while the elegant Wyndham was lounging in the background. His handsome head, with its pointed beard, was propped on a delicate wrist, as he leaned against the mantelshelf.

Of the two men confronting Granby, one was of a type with which I was well familiar. He was short and no longer as slender as he wished. His black hair was thin at the crown but thick and shiny about the ears. He wore *pince-nez*, and there was a carefully drilled moustache on the upper lip. The mouth was full, the nose thin, the chin lax, the complexion sallow and puffy. He was carefully dressed in clothes of a Continental cut, with a white slip to his waistcoat, and I could just catch a glimpse of trousers with a stripe rather broader than is usual in England.

This was the ordinary Balkan financier and man of affairs whom I had seen seated importantly at the tables of committees or on the benches of the Assembly of the League, or wandering in corridors, as prompt to crook the pregnant hinges of the knee at the approach of the real statesmen of Europe, as to exact from the world at large a due respect for his title of Excellency, or to show off his perfect French and plentiful lack of wit in interminable speeches of no importance.

The other man was less familiar. He had a shock of dark auburn hair. His clothes were ill-cut and ready-made. His coat sleeves, too short for him, exposed a large expanse of dirty cuff, red wrists and knotted hands. The face was that of a fanatic. The eyes were grey or light blue, the features lean and pitted with small indentations,

as though he had suffered from smallpox, the lips a thin line closing over a mouth of gilded teeth.

Granby was speaking to the diplomatist.

"I agree with ye, Mr. Toliu," he was saying. "Ye have some cause for suspeecion and it's to remove all sic apprehensions from your mind that I have come to Geneva, which I may tell ye is a vairy expensive city. Perhaps ye will kindly tell me of any points in connection with which ye may be wishful for enlightenment. And dinna spare my feelings. Business is business."

The man addressed as Toliu looked at Granby without changing his expression of distrust.

"We have heard nothing from Petrano for four days," he said.

He spoke in careful English, and I concluded that Granby was presumed to understand no language but his own. The sudden reference to Petrano, the murderer of Angus McGuffie, shocked me into an immediate attention. Did they yet know anything of his escape? Were they playing with Granby? That was a poor thought. I looked from the speaker to Wyndham, and my heart missed a beat. For there, on the mantelpiece, just under his elbow, lay a neatly folded copy of the *Continental Daily Mail*. The buff wrapper in which it had come by post had not yet been broken. But how long would it remain intact? Wyndham had just lit a cigarette and was holding it in a long holder of green jade.

Toliu was still speaking.

"We have, however, been informed by Wertheim," he continued, "that the papers which were so unfortunately stolen from you, the vital papers essential to us all, are now in the possession of the British Foreign Office, and that they have been dispatched to no less a person than His Excellency Radulara in the British diplomatic bag. How do you account for that, Mr. McGuffie?"

The man with the auburn hair leaned abruptly forward.

"We are waiting, comrade," he said.

His English was good, but he spoke in the curious sing-song tone of the Slav.

Granby thumped the table.

"Spies," he said with a dour, malevolent intensity. "I've told ye the papers were taken from my house in the Isle of Wight. They were taken by spies. Everywhere there are spies — British spies, Roumanian spies. Since I came into this business, Mr. Toliu, I've no had a moment's peace. I dinna feel safe in my own hame. I dinna feel safe at this moment."

There I cordially agreed with him.

He broke off, cast a furtive look about the room, lifted the palms of his hands in an uncouth Oriental gesture and broke into a series of low guttural cries, presumably Yiddish. Here, indeed, was an actor, playing the Scot and yet remembering that he was also Shadrach the Jew.

He recovered himself and looked round uneasily at the company.

"I've told ye how it was," he went on. "The plans were taken in the dead of night. I came down and opened my safe in the morning and they were no longer there."

Wyndham at the mantelpiece gently raised the elbow which rested on the *Daily Mail* and waved his hand reassuringly.

"Set your mind at rest, Mr. McGuffie," he said. "We know how to deal with spies here in Geneva. Meanwhile, you will be glad to hear that we have taken steps to recover the papers which you so unfortunately lost. They arrived at Lausanne in the early hours of this morning by King's Messenger from London. We have arranged for the bag to be intercepted and I am hoping to receive the plans of the well together with any other little documents

of interest which the bag may contain within the next few minutes."

The face of Mr. Angus McGuffie brightened considerably.

"Weel, Mr. Wyndham," he said, "that's guid news to be sure, and a credit to ye all. May we expect the papers soon?"

"At any moment," said Wyndham.

There was no sign of the crushing blow which Granby had received. What a man! I said it again as I watched. In a few minutes he was, as he thought, to be unmasked, for he could not know that I had frustrated the attempt on the bag. But Angus McGuffie was still smiling.

"There is another thing," Wyndham continued. "The King of Roumania was to have stayed at Freshwater for at least another week, but yesterday he started for Lausanne. Perhaps you can tell us the reason?"

Angus McGuffie looked blankly at his examiner.

"I can tell ye nothing about it, Mr. Wyndham," he said. "The bairn was at Freshwater when I left hame two days ago."

"He was moved a week too soon. We had, therefore, to take immediate steps. Our arrangements were already made and could not be altered. I sent a message to Mousorsky here (he indicated, as he spoke, the man with the auburn hair) and our plan was immediately put into operation. To make things safer I travelled on the train myself. Moussorsky fixed up the business with the signals. I gave the boy and his bear leader a whiff of Number 709 and handed the lad through the window myself. The train was only held up for five minutes."

He turned to the man he had addressed as Moussorsky.

"It was smart work, comrade," he added with a mocking inflection on the final word.

"The work was well done," said Moussorsky com-

placently, "but we were much upset by the change of plan. Why did the English authorities send away the King so soon? We were hoping that you would be able to tell us something."

He turned to Granby as he put the question.

Angus McGuffie brought his hand down heavily on the table.

"Spies," he said.

Wyndham smiled.

"Mr. McGuffie has found a word which fits every occasion," he observed.

"I hope he realises that the King's removal must on no account be made public until the proper moment," put in Toliu anxiously.

"I'm sure we shall all be entirely satisfied concerning Mr. McGuffie's complete discretion before he leaves us," said Wyndham pleasantly.

"Radulara may publish the thing himself," said Moussorsky.

Wyndham laughed.

"Then he would be out of office within twenty-four hours," he said. "The news of the King's disappearance will be published by us, but not till our arrangements for the revolution are complete."

"Anent this revolution —" said Mr. McGuffie.

The three men all turned and looked at him.

"Are ye sure of the people yonder?" he inquired.

"Ciuntu and his peasants will see to that," said Toliu. "It's a fool's dance he will be leading them, but it won't be the first time the simple husbandman has been led astray."

He grinned as he spoke at Moussorsky, who apparently disliked the allusion, for he scowled at the little man.

"The peasants will follow with their eyes shut," said Wyndham. "But we shall have to be careful. Breathe a

word in their ear of the gospel according to St. Lenin, of which our friend Moussorsky is so distinguished an evangelist, and Ciuntu will pipe to them in vain."

Wyndham had picked up the *Daily Mail* from the mantelpiece, and was driving home his points by gently waving it at Moussorsky.

"Mr. McGuffie will agree with me, I'm sure," he concluded abruptly.

I could see that Granby was busy piecing together the puzzle as the pieces came. He seemed to have forgotten his own danger.

"I dinna like it," he said, shaking his head. "Ye seem to be trying to mix oil and water in this business, if you'll pardon the weeticism. Ye canna expect high finance to run cheek by jowl wi' folk that have no respect for the rights o' property."

I don't know what further revelation this skilful pumping might have drawn from the three conspirators, for at that moment, the door opened and the manservant who had met me on the threshold half an hour ago entered the room. He held in his hand a slate which he handed to Moussorsky who looked at it.

"It's Dumont," he said — "from Lausanne."

"The boy," murmured Wyndham. "We'd better have him in at once," he added to Moussorsky.

Moussorsky scribbled something on the slate and gave it back to the servant, who read what was written, nodded and withdrew.

I looked at Granby. The dour face of Angus McGuffie had not changed a muscle. But quietly, as they waited for the man from Lausanne, who for all he knew was bringing to that room the information that he was an agent of the British Government in masquerade, he moved, with a stiff angular gait, to a position opposite the three men, and with his back to the wall. It was perhaps half a minute

before Dumont entered. I longed to shout at Granby the glad news that at least he had nothing to fear from the bag snatchers. But I could not, on the other hand, help wondering what would be his state of mind if he knew that in the newspaper with which Wyndham so elegantly fanned himself was a full account of the murder of the man he was impersonating. The position seemed full of endless possibilities.

Again the door was opened and Dumont entered. I instantly recognised him as one of the pair I had last seen that morning standing full in the path of the angry bull whom I had sent charging from his compound. He was still wearing the uniform of Aspaleia.

"Come in, Dumont," said Toliu.

Dumont looked deprecatingly at Wyndham.

"I'm sorry," he began.

"What?" shouted Moussorsky, leaping forward and bending half over the table. "You don't mean to say that you have failed?"

"I got the bag all right," said Dumont. "Everything went exactly as we arranged. But the English pigs smelled a rat. There were two of them — the Vice Consul himself and a young jackanapes whom I will one day — But that can wait. You cannot figure to yourself what I have suffered. — First, if you please, they smash my motor cycle, and then I am exposed to the onslaught of a bull rendered furious with pain and indignity."

The three men listened in gloomy silence.

"Spare us the details," said Wyndham. "This means I suppose, that the bag was recovered and that the plans of the well have gone to Radulara."

"The devil blast you," shouted Moussorsky, and continued in Russian. Evidently he was a simple soul and believed in relieving his feelings.

"This," murmured the little diplomatist, "is deplorable."

"British spies," said Mr. McGuffie, who had moved back to the table.

"Tell me, Dumont," said Wyndham airily, "was the sneezing powder a success?"

"What does it matter?" grunted Moussorsky. "We haven't got the plans. What more do you want?"

Wyndham looked reproachfully at his confederates.

"My dear Moussorsky," he said, "can it be that you are incapable of a disinterested passion? All useful things have been due to the genial curiosity of artists and inventors. I think you will admit that my own small knowledge of men and things counts for something, and I can assure you that I owe what little ability I possess to a constant craving for entirely irrelevant information. I think it was Ravel who wrote over one of his most exquisite pieces: *il n'y a rien de si beau que de faire des choses inutiles*. I am interested in the discoveries and experiments of the young Antoniades. The youth has genius. He may yet live to rival his master, the celebrated Professor Kreutzemark. I am happy to think that our present adventure, which has certain aspects that are not a little sordid and disagreeable, is giving him an opportunity to test some of his more ingenious discoveries."

"There was nothing wrong with the sneezing powder," said Dumont. "It worked like a charm."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Wyndham. "I can myself testify to the efficiency of his new narcotic gas. I tried it myself only the night before last on the little King. I very nearly made a bad mistake, however, and used a cylinder of Number 351 by mistake. The result would have been amusing, but scarcely so effective."

Moussorsky moved impatiently.

"Damnation," he said. "This isn't a meeting of the Chemical Research Society."

"Dinna make light of learning, laddie," broke in Mr.

McGuffie. "There is always time to be interested in the wonders of science, and I'm uncommon curious mysel' in all sic matters, and if time allowed, I would be fain to hear of this Number 351 which Meester Wyndham didn't use."

"An amusing discovery of my young friend," said Wyndham, "a species of laughing gas, very useful in dispersing crowds. No more revolutions or barricades. The people come forth breathing fire and slaughter, and instead of the celebrated whiff of grapeshot we give them a whiff of Number 351. The people then retire. *Solvitur ridendo.*"

Moussorsky thrust his face within a few inches of Wyndham.

"See here," he said angrily. "Dubosc is due to reach this house at eleven. What are we going to do? We've got to convince him somehow of the existence of the well."

I watched Granby narrowly. His face was a mask of gloom. Very creditably he shared the depression of his colleagues. My heart went out to him, and my spirits rose. But who was Dubosc?

Wyndham, by the mantelpiece, was smiling.

"It is certainly unfortunate," he said, "that we should not have got the plans and we must take steps to recover them at once."

Dumont raised his head.

"That will be my business," he said. "We must now adopt the second plan. Radulara may have those plans but he will not have them long. I guarantee you shall have them within a couple of hours."

"Not if I can get to the telephone first," I muttered.

"Excellent," said Wyndham. "Meanwhile, we must continue to meet Dubosc without them. We have here a gentleman who can tell Dubosc all that he needs to know. It is unfortunate that we should have lost the plans, but

it is all the more fortunate that we should have found Mr. McGuffie."

Wyndham smiled encouragingly at Granby. Then, with a sudden tightening of the heart, I saw him run a negligent finger through the wrapper of the *Continental Daily Mail*.

CHAPTER X

I SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES

There is a state of mind which has often been described as "an agony of apprehension." I had often wondered what it was like; now I knew. I even found myself hoping that Wyndham, as he played and gestured with the folded sheet, would open and read it. That would, at least, put an end to the anxiety which held me suspended among those beastly apples.

Flamboy Wyndham, however, continued to hold the newspaper, still unfolded, in his hand, and to smile in his pleasant way at the assembled company.

"Dubosc may be here at any moment," observed Toliu, looking at his watch.

"That is a small matter," replied Wyndham, "and can easily be adjusted."

He turned to Dumont as he spoke.

"Will you be good enough," he asked, "to ring up Mont Blanc 56421. Ask for Monsieur Dubosc and enquire whether it would be convenient for him to come here at three o'clock this afternoon instead of at eleven o'clock this morning. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," said Dumont.

The man rose wearily from his chair and limped from the room.

"That disposes of our first difficulty," said Wyndham, with a gracious wave of the folded newspaper.

Angus McGuffie was meanwhile looking sourly at Mousorsky.

"Gentlemen," he observed with an angular dignity, "I think ye owe me an explanation."

"By all means, Mr. McGuffie," said Wyndham.

"I would wish ye to know," continued McGuffie, flushing with apparent indignation, "that I mislike the attitude ye have chosen to adopt. There must be confidence between us, gentlemen, and I have the impression that ye are inclined to doubt my *bona fides*."

"On the contrary," said Wyndham smoothly, "We have invited you here to meet us in order that we may henceforth be able to work together in perfect harmony. Letters are rarely so satisfactory as a personal interview. We therefore asked you to come to Geneva so that we might talk the whole matter over in a friendly spirit."

"And didn't I come to see ye at once?" said Granby, glowing with a sense of virtue, "sparing neither time nor money? Why, man, I travelled first-class."

"You have informed us," pursued Wyndham, "that your papers were stolen, a fact that we already knew from Wertheim. We have failed, so far, to recover them, and we have to meet Dubosc this afternoon. Have you any suggestions?"

Mr. McGuffie smoothed the hair upon the crown of his head.

"It's going to be a bit deefcult. I'm no denying it, Mr. Wyndham."

"The position is this," said Wyndham, "Dubosc is the manager here in Geneva of an important international bank. He has no capital of his own and privately he has been unfortunate in his speculations. On the understanding that, if he pulls off this deal for us, he will be allowed to make a handsome profit himself he is prepared to authorise an advance from the bank on the security of the well and to hand us over at once a pretty considerable sum. He is a trusted servant of the bank and allowed a

pretty free hand in such matters. He has, however, to meet his directors once a fortnight, and to justify his commitments. I believe that personally he will be prepared to sign a cheque as soon as he is satisfied of the existence and commercial possibilities of the well. It will be your task, Mr. McGuffie, to convince him in respect of those matters by quoting the necessary facts and figures. The actual plans of the well, however, will sooner or later be essential, and Dubosc must be assured that he will be able to produce them to his directors at the next fortnightly meeting of the board."

Mr. McGuffie, who had followed this explanation with much shrewd nodding of the head, laid his hand emphatically upon the table.

"Ye may rely upon me," he said. "I can give Dubosc the particulars he needs, and, if he'll take the will for the deed in the matter o' handing over the papers, ye can tide things over nicely till the plans are recovered."

Wyndham smiled.

"I'm glad you understand the position so easily, Mr. McGuffie," he said. "Since you have lost the plans, it is only fair to us that you should convince Dubosc that the well is in existence. In fact, Mr. McGuffie, it will be your duty to convince him."

"Then if ye've no objection," said Mr. McGuffie, rising from his chair, "I'll be getting back to my hotel."

"What's that?" shouted Moussorsky.

"Is it really necessary for you to leave us?" asked Wyndham pleasantly.

Mr. McGuffie nodded his head.

"Twelve francs a day, all found," he said. "And I'm no' the man to pay for a lunch that I dinna eat."

"But naturally Mr. McGuffie, you will lunch with us."

"Thank ye kindly, Mr. Wyndham. But it's the principle that vexes me. Besides I'm thinking of the plans. I

canna convince Dubosc with empty hands and I have sufficient papers at the hotel to make it possible for me to show him something which, unless he is a very great expert indeed, will be sufficient for the purpose."

Moussorsky made to speak, but Wyndham interposed.

"Very well," he said. "You shall return to your hotel, and my friend, Mr. Toliu will, I am sure, be delighted to take you back to Geneva in his car and to give you any assistance that may be necessary."

"Thank God," I murmured.

It was incredible, but Granby was getting away with it. It was true that the Flamboys were keeping him under observation, but, if little Toliu thought he was going to control Granby, he would find that he had been sold a St. Bernard.

But Granby was speaking.

"That's verra kind of Mr. Toliu, I'm sure," he was saying, "and as it is now nigh upon eleven o'clock, I think we'd better start at once."

Toliu had risen from his chair by the table, and Granby moved slowly towards the door. Together they stood a moment exchanging reminders and farewells. Then at last to my infinite relief the door closed behind them. A moment later I heard the whirr of a self-starter, and from my position in the tree I saw an open two-seater come into view from the back of the house. Toliu, with Granby beside him, was at the wheel.

I had now only to effect an inconspicuous retreat and get back to the Pension de la Reine without loss of time. I looked again into the room. Wyndham was still playing with his copy of the *Daily Mail*, and neither he nor Moussorsky showed any signs of moving. Slowly I began to climb down the ladder, being very careful to make no unnecessary noise. So carefully did I concentrate upon my going that my surprise was all the greater when, as I

stepped from the ladder to the ground, two heavy hands gripped me by the shoulders, and a voice sounded thickly in my ear.

"*Qu'est-ce que vous f . . . tez là?*" it demanded.

I turned my head swiftly to discover myself in the clutches of the gardener. He shifted his grip to my coat collar and thrust a menacing and earthy fist under my nose.

"I hold you," he said.

I twisted in his grasp, but undoubtedly he held me.

"Fix to me the peace," I urged, "and it shall be worth twenty francs."

"I hold you," repeated the man, "the police shall erect a *procès-verbal*."

Shades of William Tell, this was one of the incorruptibles. I thrust my hand savagely against the man's mouth, and silently for a moment we wrestled and swayed at the foot of the tree. But alas! the peasants of Switzerland are accustomed to devote their Sunday afternoons to the noble sport of catch-as-catch-can. In vain did I struggle to shake the man off. I had apparently got hold of a local champion, or rather he had hold of me.

Then a voice, smooth and inflexible, fell upon my ear, and looking over my opponent's broad shoulder, I beheld Wyndham advancing with willowy gait towards us.

"Dear me, Jacques," he was saying in French, "is this an exhibition of your national pastime?"

The gardener, breathing heavily, began to explain the situation without, however, relaxing his grip. Meanwhile Moussorsky had appeared and stood framed in the doorway, his hard face gleaming with anger and alarm.

"Wyndham," I said, cutting short the explanations of my captor, "I should be grateful if you would tell this fellow of yours to remove his hand from my collar. You will see for yourself that the man is drunk."

"I quite understand your feelings, Baxter," said Wyndham. "Jacques is indeed of the earth earthy, and his hands are far from clean. You may release the gentleman, Jacques," he added in French.

The iron grip was relaxed, and Jacques, breathing heavily, scowled at me with a bucolic intensity.

"*Mais qu'est-ce qu'il f . . . tait là?*" he demanded generally of us all.

"The expression is inelegant, but not altogether beside the point," Wyndham continued. "It reminds me of the more classic refrain, '*Mais qu'est-ce qu'il faisait dans cette galère?*'" In other words, my excellent Jacques, how does Mr. Baxter come to be wearing your hat and coat?"

I removed the straw hat, took off the coat, and handed these objects to Jacques with a bow. Then I turned to Wyndham.

"I will be frank with you," I said.

"Then shall we return to the house?" Wyndham suggested.

"Certainly," I said.

I agreed all the more readily, as I had not yet the smallest idea of what I intended to say. I walked towards the front door, and Moussorsky, with a face like an executioner, stood aside to let me pass, while Wyndham stayed behind a moment to mollify the gardener. During this short but necessary interval my mind was working rapidly, and by the time Wyndham entered, and we all stood together in the living room, I had decided on my line of defence.

Wyndham took up his old position by the mantelpiece. His assumption of this familiar attitude reminded me of the *Continental Daily Mail*. I looked hastily round the room, and with a slight thrill saw it was lying beside me on the table.

"Now, Baxter," said Wyndham genially. "What exactly have you been doing?"

"Well," I began, "I see no reason why I should spare you the truth. It will hardly come as a surprise to you, after the way in which you received him this morning, that my chief Mr. McGuffie was somewhat anxious as to the result of his interview. He was aware that you had grave suspicions as to his conduct and he felt it would be as well for his own protection that there should be a witness of what occurred. You refused to accept me as his secretary. I, therefore, took other steps."

"In other words you climbed into the apple tree and contrived to overhear our conference."

"Exactly."

"And is Mr. McGuffie now convinced of our good faith?"

"I don't know. I haven't had an opportunity of speaking to him. But the attitude of certain of your colleagues is still, shall we say, ambiguous."

I looked pointedly at Moussorsky as I spoke.

"Mr. McGuffie will, of course, return to meet Dubosc here at three o'clock this afternoon?" said Wyndham.

"I imagine that your friend Toliu will see to that," I said. "I would point out, however, that you not only need his presence here, but his collaboration. My chief is not a man to be easily misled. He is, moreover, of a very stubborn disposition, and he will certainly not be brow-beaten. It is, therefore, desirable from your own point of view not to reawaken his suspicions."

"Do you hear that, Moussorsky?" Wyndham inquired. "You must really try to cultivate a more engaging manner."

"Suspensions be damned," said Moussorsky. "I'll guarantee that once we get him here with Dubosc, he will do what we want. Otherwise —"

"My dear Moussorsky," Wyndham plaintively interrupted, "these virile methods of yours are hardly in the present instance appropriate. I agree with Mr. Baxter. The suspicions of Mr. McGuffie must not again be awakened."

"In that case," I said promptly, "I had better be getting back to Geneva."

I moved towards the door as I spoke. Moussorsky leaped forward.

"So that's your game, is it?" he said. "You're playing to get away, young man?"

I moved back wearily to the table.

"As you please," I said.

Wyndham raised his hand.

"One moment," he said. "I don't quite follow Mr. Baxter's train of thought. Why should it be necessary for him to return to Geneva?"

"Because my chief will expect to see me there. We agreed that nothing should prevent our meeting at lunch to-day. If I should fail to turn up, he might think I was being detained."

"Detained?"

"By yourselves, gentlemen."

Wyndham reflected a moment.

"A cigarette, Baxter," he asked, extending to me a slim case exquisitely enamelled.

"Thank you," I said, and, while Moussorsky sourly regarded these amenities, Wyndham came to the table and offered me a light.

"I see your point," he continued, as he flung the match into the fire. "If you fail to report to your chief in Geneva he will return to us with an uneasy suspicion at the back of his mind that we have caught you eavesdropping, and are keeping you here against your will. Very well, Baxter. We will minister to a mind diseased. Mr. McGuffie will

enter, seething with distrust, and the first person he shall see will be his faithful secretary sitting in the midst of us as a friend with friends. We shall tell him the amusing story of the gardener, express our regret that he should so wrongly have suspected us, and you will be able to describe to him our friendly and frank reception of yourself."

I was silent a moment. Clearly I was not to get away, and that confounded newspaper was still waiting to be read. I had sat that morning in the apple tree for the better part of an hour sweating with fear lest Wyndham should open it and destroy my friend Granby. Now I was sweating on my own account.

"Well, Baxter," said Wyndham pleasantly. "Do you see any flaw in my proposal?"

"None whatever," I admitted.

"Then you will lunch with us, Baxter. We shall be delighted. You will find Moussorsky an interesting companion. Among other things, he is an authority on revolutionary poetry, and is at present engaged on a translation into Russian of the 'Songs Before Sunrise.' He is also a great admirer of Shelley. You know the sort of thing:

How wonderful is Death!
Death and his brother Sleep."

He looked at me quizzically a moment, and then picked up the *Continental Daily Mail* from the table. He opened it casually, and his eye ran over the fatal page. Not a muscle of his face moved.

"How does it go on, Moussorsky?" he asked.

Moussorsky took up the refrain harshly but with feeling:

"One, pale as yonder waning moon
With lips of lurid blue;

The other, rosy as the morn
When throned on ocean's wave."

Wyndham glanced at me over the top of the paper and then smiled ironically upon the lyrical Moussorsky.

"Bravo, comrade," he said, "well spoken, with good accent and good discretion. But your only poet to-day is the journalist. Listen to this: 'Mrs. Drake Takes Her Family for a Walk.' Are we to believe it, I wonder? Or is it merely a *canard*?"

He threw down the newspaper, looked me straight in the face, then suddenly nodded his head and broke into a brilliant smile.

"Yes, Baxter," he said. "I've seen it."

For a moment we neither of us spoke or moved. Then Wyndham continued quietly.

"I congratulate you," he continued. "You're a cool customer, very cool indeed. And you put style into your work. I'm a bit of stylist myself. It's the only thing that matters in the long run. I recognise in you one of the Cornelians. In fact I should like to keep this matter strictly between ourselves, for I fear that with the entry of our friend Moussorsky there will be an inevitable decline in our present high level of accomplishment."

Moussorsky had regained his customary expression of sour hostility to the world at large.

"I don't understand your British humour," he said. "What does all this mean?"

"It means, my dear Moussorsky, that Mr. Angus McGuffie will, unfortunately, not be here this afternoon at 3 P. M."

Moussorsky gazed stupidly from one to other of us.

"Why shouldn't he be here?" he asked.

"Mr. McGuffie will not be here," said Wyndham, "be-

cause he was murdered at his house in the Isle of Wight three days ago by Constantine Petrano."

"What?" roared Moussorsky, starting forward.

Wyndham looked at me quizzically.

"It's in the newspaper," he said.

He handed the sheet to Moussorsky, who looked it through, uttering strange cries, and then he flung it down.

"Then who," he asked, "who in the devil's name was the man we saw this morning?"

Wyndham looked at me.

"We should rather like to know," he said.

"Echo answers who," I replied.

Now that the fat was really in the fire I was beginning to enjoy myself. The relief from my previous suspense was inevitable and complete.

"Perhaps," conceded Wyndham, "we could scarcely expect you to tell us that. There is, on the other hand, no reason why you should be reticent in regard to yourself. In the words of the gardener—but no, I prefer the more classic phrase. *Qu'est-ce que vous faisiez dans cette galère?*"

"I just happen to be acquainted with McGuffie," I said.

"Which?" demanded Wyndham.

"Both," I answered.

"And you really *are* Baxter," said Wyndham, anxiously.

"I really am Baxter."

"I'm glad of that. I was beginning to fear that you, too, might have been murdered three days ago. And what is your occupation, apart from being the confidential secretary of a man who has ceased to exist?"

This, I thought, would give me an opportunity.

"I am a member of the Secretariat of the League of Nations," I answered. "Perhaps you would like to see my credentials."

I dived into my pocket, produced my pink card and handed it to Wyndham.

Wyndham examined it curiously and handed it back.

I had the impression that during this exchange of courtesies he was doing precisely the same thing as myself, wondering, in short, how to deal with the new situation that had arisen; and, as he handed the pink card back to me, I could see that he had made up his mind.

Moussorsky looked like a man on the brink of apoplexy. He thrust himself between us.

"Leave this to me," he said. "Give me ten minutes alone with this young interloper, and I guarantee to find out everything we need to know. I was not for nothing an interrogating commissar of the Tcheka for three years."

Again Wyndham gave me that quizzical glance as though to say: *I told you how it would be*. Yet, strangely enough, I was more afraid of him than of his blustering comrade. Moussorsky was, I could see, a bundle of nerves, whereas Wyndham had not turned a hair.

"If you will pardon me saying so, comrade," he said, turning to Moussorsky, "you don't quite seem to realise the position."

"It's pretty obvious, isn't it?" said Moussorsky. "We've been discussing our plans with a perfect stranger, and we have got to discover who he is and what he is supposed to be doing."

"You accordingly propose to take our young friend aside and persuade him to reveal the identity of the false McGuffie."

"I do."

"And how exactly is that going to help us?"

Moussorsky stared vacantly at Wyndham.

"Don't you want to know who it was that fooled us this morning?"

"Not particularly," said Wyndham pleasantly. "He

may be Smith or Hyphen-Smith. What's in a name? We know already what is essential. He is obviously an agent of somebody who is working to defeat our plans. I fail to see, my dear Moussorsky, what more useful knowledge we are likely to gain by ill-treating our friend Baxter, to whom incidentally I have taken a fancy."

Moussorsky listened to Wyndham with respect, but he was still inclined to protest.

"Surely it would help us to know who those people are," he urged.

"They are presumably British agents, coöperating with the Roumanian Government," said Wyndham.

"But why should British agents be interfering in Roumania?" Moussorsky demanded.

"Ask yourself, comrade," said Wyndham.

Moussorsky passed a heavy hand through his auburn hair.

"Curse the British pigs," he said. "They stand always in the path of progress. They fear perhaps our revolution. They live in dread of the Holy War. Moscow to them is Antichrist. But the day will come."

Moussorsky, addressing a meeting of the Labour Church, would have been an undoubted success, but in that quiet eighteenth-century room with its green hangings and its exquisite furniture of Venetian lacquer he was woefully out of place. There, at least, Wyndham agreed with me, and a smile of intelligence passed between us. But business was business. Wyndham turned to his colleague.

"All in good time, comrade. Meanwhile there is, as it seems to me, only one point that is really essential, and if Baxter can help us there and refuses to do so, I should feel it my duty to confide him to your untender mercies."

He turned to me.

"Tell me, Baxter, is your mysterious friend likely to

return to us here this afternoon? Is he ready to keep the appointment we have made for him with Dubosc? Will he continue his masterly impersonation which henceforth we shall be able to appreciate as it deserves? That is the only point which is really vital."

"Of course, he will not return," said Moussorsky. "He will have been warned of Petrano's escape. Or, if he does return, it will be with a carload of police."

"You are forgetting Toliu," said Wyndham softly. "Toliu will keep him well in view. My own impression is that he will return. He is evidently a very remarkable man. He risked a good deal this morning to obtain certain information, and I don't think he has yet got quite all the particulars he needs. Yes, I think he will return and I think he will continue to play our game for us, as long as he thinks that we take him for the real McGuffie. What do you say to that, Baxter?"

"You have obviously no need of any guidance from me," I said. "You read the situation perfectly."

"We will assume, then, that your friend will return and that his admirable performance will be continued."

Moussorsky clenched his knotted hands.

"Heaven help him," he said.

"Heaven will also, I trust, help you to restrain yourself, Moussorsky. Mr. McGuffie must remain Mr. McGuffie to the end of the chapter. He alone can persuade Dubosc to sign us a cheque this afternoon. Besides, I would not miss a line of his performance for more than the value of the well itself. The man is an artist. Our friend, Baxter, has style, but this other one is a master."

Wyndham looked at his watch.

"Almost time for lunch," he said. "I think we have settled everything. You, Baxter, will lunch here, and your chief on his arrival will find you installed as one of us. Dubosc will arrive at three. He will, I hope, have signed

us a cheque by three-thirty. Meanwhile, we are taking steps for the plans of the well to be recovered, so that in our further dealings with Dubosc we shall be able to dispense with Mr. McGuffie, either in name or person. We shall then have the pleasure of meeting your chief in his true character and of taking him in retrospect over the details of his remarkable performance."

"An interesting programme," I murmured.

Wyndham smiled at me, but there came a cold gleam into his eye and there darted from him a warning as swift and deadly as the dart of a foil in the hand of a master of fencing.

"An interesting programme, as you say," he said. "And I am particularly anxious that it should go forward without a hitch. Otherwise —"

Moussorsky leaned forward, produced an automatic from his pocket, and thrust it into my face.

Wyndham shook his head and smiled at me whimsically.

"I was afraid it would make an appearance sooner or later," he sighed. "Moussorsky believes in putting all his cards on the table."

I moved back a pace. The sudden sight of the automatic, gleaming under my eyes and almost touching my cheek brought home to me the position in which I stood. These men would literally stick at nothing and Granby was coming to meet them. This was the fourth reel.

I stood staring at the glittering barrel of the automatic, till suddenly Moussorsky, hearing a noise outside, lowered it and returned it quickly to his pocket.

We all turned instinctively to the window. There was a crunching of heavy tyres upon gravel, and the bonnet and forepart of what looked like a motor van came into view.

Then I perceived that what I had taken for a van was, in fact, a Red Cross ambulance. Moussorsky moved to the

door. There followed a sound of footsteps in the garden and the door was almost immediately pushed open.

A woman stood on the threshold and after an instant's pause moved into the room.

It was Mademoiselle Vallier.

I gazed at her in blank astonishment. What was this?

The answer came swiftly and in a shape that brought me to my feet with feelings which I feel it hard to describe.

For, close at her heels, came two men in Red Cross uniform bearing a stretcher and, on the stretcher, lying unconscious or dead, I could not tell which, was Ann Winspeare.

CHAPTER XI

I LUNCH IN STRANGE COMPANY

I felt a restraining hand and only then did I perceive that I had crossed the room towards the group by the stretchers. It was Wyndham who pulled me up with a hand on my arm, and for a moment we stood side by side looking down at Ann. She was pale and breathing, perhaps a thought more heavily than was natural, but to all outward seeming she was in other respects in perfect health. Mademoiselle Vallier stood facing us from the other side of the stretcher. I saw that she recognised me at once; but she had eyes only for Wyndham. So that was how the wind lay. But he looked back at her without enthusiasm.

"What next?" he said at last.

The tone was pleasant, but he was obviously far from pleased. As for me, I felt like kicking myself; in fact, I almost asked Moussorsky to do it for me. Ann had been right the whole time. They were all in it—ex-governess Vallier; elegant Wyndham; a signalman unknown; two agents of Aspaleia; the young hope of chemists, Antoniades. How large and various was the net. And I had left Ann firmly entangled in the meshes.

"It's a long story, Francis," began Mademoiselle Vallier. "I suggest that Miss Winspeare be taken to the inner *salon*."

Wyndham looked down at Ann again for a moment. She was lying slim and straight. The rug had slipped to one side, revealing the brown travelling frock in which

she had driven with me to Lausanne. There was a faint flush on her cheeks and her hair was untidy. How she would have hated to be caught thus unawares.

Wyndham directed the two stretcher bearers, who belonged, I noticed, to a well-known Swiss firm, the Maison Weber, who specialise in the transport of the sick, to take up their burden.

"In there," he said briefly.

The men moved obediently towards a pair of sliding doors that stood at the end of the room. Wyndham preceded them and pulled the doors apart. I moved forward with a vague intention of intervening, but found myself confronted by Moussorsky.

"You will stay where you are," he said.

His hand went to his pocket as he spoke. Should I try conclusions with him? The pistol was obviously a bluff. But what was the use? As George Robey used to say: "Ye are many, I am one." The doors closed behind the stretcher party and, for a few minutes, I was left alone with Moussorsky and my own reflections. These were sufficiently bitter.

I had been nicely fooled by Mademoiselle Vallier. Yet how could I have suspected yesterday that I was leaving Ann with an agent of the Flamboys? Had I not heard Ann telling me that all was well, and that I was free to go about my business? How had that little comedy been arranged? I had a sudden vision of her behind the white panelled door in the house at Lausanne bidding me good-night under a compulsion which I did not dare to imagine.

There came a murmur of voices from the adjoining room. Mademoiselle Vallier was telling her tale.

I leaned heavily against the table. I was to take things as they came — but there were limits, and here was Ann a prisoner. They had put her through it once already. What were they doing now? I strained my ears to listen,

but could hear only a low murmur of voices. Then, suddenly — so curiously fashioned is the mind — amid all these alarms, excursions, these treasures, stratagems and spoils, I was filled with an elation which I can find no words to describe.

I suddenly realised that I loved Ann.

It was as though I had turned a corner in a dark maze and found the exit staring me in the face. I forgot all about our present misfortune. There was nothing to which I could relate this stupendous fact. It blotted everything. Whether she loved me too, whether we should ever get out of the toils was not for the moment a thing to be considered. My eyes were bright when Wyndham reëntered the room.

He was accompanied by Mademoiselle Vallier, and the two men from Webers. He took the men to the door, paid them for their services, and dismissed them. A moment later the ambulance drove away.

Wyndham then came over to me by the table.

"Baxter," he said. "This further complication is none of my seeking. I was quite unaware that Miss Winspeare had called upon this lady at Lausanne. I am sorry that she is here."

"The remedy is obvious," I pointed out. "You have only to send her away."

"You know very well that I can do nothing of the kind," he replied. "Miss Winspeare, like yourself, knows too much, and will, therefore, have to remain with us for the present. All I can do is to see that her visit to Mont Allègre shall be more agreeable than she may perhaps anticipate."

"You might have spared me this, Therèse," he concluded, turning to Mademoiselle Vallier, who had listened to his remarks with obvious impatience.

"*Mon Dieu*, Francis," she exclaimed, and I saw that she was trying hard to control her anger. "What else was I to do? I had to make sure of the girl. We have not yet found out how much she knows, or what she intends to do. We couldn't get a word out of her, though it was not for want of trying."

Wyndham controlled himself with an effort. He was clearly put out by what had happened, and I hoped for the moment that there would be an outburst, but he suddenly changed his manner.

"It would seem," he said with a gentle irony, "that Miss Winspeare has not been having a very pleasant time with you at Lausanne. We must see what we can do to remove the bad impression she has received of our hospitality. Meanwhile, Moussorsky, a cocktail, perhaps, is indicated."

"Comrade Moussorsky has a neat hand with a cocktail," he added, turning to me. "An unexpected but useful accomplishment."

You will note that he always addressed Moussorsky as "Comrade." He seemed to delight in this delicate emphasis of the contrast between them.

The tall Russian, who had been lounging on a chair within easy reach of myself, rose and, crossing the room, disappeared behind the glass partition.

Wyndham turned again to Mademoiselle Vallier.

"I gather from Toliu that the King has reached his proper quarters," he said.

"I'm glad to hear it," she answered. "I had a nice time of it yesterday. You men muddled everything as usual. Toliu arrived with the King in the early morning and started for —"

Wyndham flashed her a warning look.

"— the hiding place, at about ten," she continued.

"He hadn't been gone half an hour before the police turned up, searched the place and found only me and my nephew Charles."

She looked curiously at Wyndham as she spoke, and in the momentary pause I heard him tapping a cigarette on the back of his case.

"I always thought there was something fishy about that nephew," I said to myself.

"Well," continued Mademoiselle Vallier, "the police had scarcely left the house when reënter Toliu with King. Tableau. His idiot chauffeur had tried conclusions with a market cart in the outskirts of Lausanne. Toliu had shown sense enough to leave the man to deal with the situation and came with the King bleating to me for another car. Jules, of course, had chosen that day of all days to take the magneto down and it was late in the evening before my car was ready. Meanwhile, at about eight o'clock Miss Winspeare called with her cousin, Mr. Baxter. I was able to deal with him," — and here she threw me a contemptuous look — "but Miss Winspeare was made of sterner stuff. She discovered the presence of the King by a trick. So I had to keep her while Toliu, as soon as Mr. Baxter was safely away, set off with the boy. I lost no time in getting rid of them as I did not know whether Mr. Baxter might not begin to use his wits after leaving the house, and return perhaps with the police a second time."

"I'm glad he so gallantly failed to use them in your presence, Therèse," said Wyndham. "But you always had a way with you."

Moussorsky was now approaching us with a tray of cocktails which he had prepared in the next room. We each took a glass from the tray. Moussorsky emptied his own at a gulp and left us hurriedly.

"I will go and see about lunch," he said.

Mademoiselle Vallier made a slight grimace after his retreating figure and then, glass in hand, turned to look at Wyndham.

"Well, Francis," she said, "aren't you going to thank me?"

She was half standing, half sitting on the broad edge of a leather armchair. She was dressed in a black frock, and her slim legs were clad in the thinnest of silk stockings, with little diamond buckles sparkling on her shoes. She made a charming picture.

Wyndham raised his glass to us both.

"I will drink to your better acquaintance," he said. "You, my dear Baxter, will find Mademoiselle Vallier a stimulating companion and you, Therèse, will, I am sure, agree with me that Mr. Baxter, though he may not have shone at your first encounter, is well worth cultivating. I can promise you that he is much too good a sportsman to bear you any grudge for imposing on him so successfully yesterday."

Mademoiselle Vallier flushed. She had appealed to him for approval and he had, indirectly but obviously, ignored her advance.

"But here is lunch," he exclaimed with every appearance of satisfaction.

The door had opened and Moussorsky appeared, directing the efforts of two manservants—at least I must describe them as such—who wheeled a table already laid into the centre of the room. Seldom have I seen two faces of a more brutal type. Moussorsky had a curious way with them. One of them tripped slightly as he pushed the table into the room, so that the glass upon it shivered and rattled. He was rewarded by a resounding clip over the ear and a volley of what I supposed were Russian oaths. He paid no attention either to the blow or to the language—a fact which impressed me even more than

the blow itself. I half rose from my chair, but Wyndham and Mademoiselle Vallier appeared quite unmoved.

Wyndham said with a smile:

"This is a quaint establishment, Baxter, and I advise you to allow Moussorsky, who is in a sense our host, to manage it in his own way. His servants thoroughly understand him, which in itself says something for his methods seeing that one of them is deaf and dumb while the other is what the Elizabethans so charmingly described as a natural. Both, he assures me, are excellent fellows."

Looking again at the servants, I identified one of them as the man who had brought in the slate announcing the arrival of Dumont, and after a moment I recognised in the other the dirty individual who had puffed the fumes of his sneezing mixture into our faces when Gaylor and I had been leaving the station at Lausanne.

That was a curious meal. I can't pretend that my appetite was of the best, though the food was good enough—I wonder whether it had been cooked by the deaf-mute or the natural—and a really excellent hock was provided by the management. I sat between Moussorsky and Mademoiselle Vallier. For the first quarter of an hour I was considerably embarrassed by the advances of my fair neighbour, and I was even more embarrassed when I perceived their motive. Mademoiselle Vallier was an expert in dissimulation, as I had good reason to remember, but in this case she was unable to disguise her intentions. She was quite obviously infatuated with Wyndham. She was being as sweet as honey to me in a desperate effort to provoke him. I could see, however, that the manœuvre was in vain, and I divined also the reason. Wyndham was thinking of something, or rather of some one, else. He left the table no less than three times during lunch in order to look at Ann, who was lying on the sofa in the next room, and the only occasion on which

he spoke directly to Mademoiselle Vallier was when he asked her about the quality and quantity of the drug which she had administered to her patient. I rather liked the man for his anxiety and I certainly shared his relief when Mademoiselle Vallier explained that she had given Ann only a small dose of some sort of preparation of hyocin.

Wyndham talked easily and well on many subjects. He seemed to be unaware that one at least of his guests was sitting there, so to speak, at the wrong end of a pistol. He seemed equally unaware of the comedy which Mademoiselle Vallier was playing for his benefit. He praised the wine, complimented Moussorsky on his house-keeping, and compelled me to tell the story of my adventures with the bag. He seemed particularly to enjoy the episode of the bull. I responded at random. There was a John Baxter who sat quietly at the table, eating and drinking, playing a comedy because the cues were given, unable to realise that his neighbour had an automatic in his pocket, and that Ann Winspeare was lying a prisoner in the next room. He seemed to have little or nothing to do with the John Baxter who had become a character in a nightmare, and had just been shattered with the revelation that he was in love. There was no relation between appearance and reality. I was at lunch, and lunch was lunch. When it was over things might begin to happen again. Meanwhile, I was telling the story of the bull and the manservant was filling my glass and Wyndham was smiling.

Then, with a start, John Baxter was himself again, one and indivisible. Ann, rather pale, was standing between the sliding doors.

I rose to my feet, but Wyndham was before me. In a flash he had taken her arm and was leading her to the table.

"Please sit down," he said.

She stood a moment looking uncertainly round the group. She did not at once see me.

"I hope you are not feeling too unwell, Miss Winspeare," he said.

"No," she answered uncertainly. "But I'm surprised to see you here, Mr. Wyndham."

"We will talk of that later, if you don't mind," he said kindly. "We are your friends, Miss Winspeare. I can assure you of that."

"Ann," I began impulsively.

But Wyndham hastily intervened.

"You know Mr. Baxter, of course," he said.

Ann looked at me in stupefaction.

"You, too," she murmured. "What a muddle it all is!"

"Ann," I said again, "these are the men who have abducted Peter, and Wyndham there is one of them."

Ann looked from one to other of us.

"There is no mistake, Ann," I said.

To my extreme confusion she ignored me utterly.

There was a short silence. Every one was looking at Ann, wondering how she would take it. She hesitated, and then, as though she had come to some conclusion, she turned to Wyndham.

"Mr. Wyndham," she said, "I'm sure you can put this right."

"If you will give me an opportunity," he said.

Ann rose from the chair in which Wyndham had placed her.

"Do you wish to speak to me alone?"

Wyndham looked round upon us with his enigmatic smile and his eye rested slightly longer on the flushed face of Mademoiselle Vallier, who was crushing a lighted cigarette upon her plate, than on the rest of us.

Then he turned to Ann.

"Suppose we take a turn in the orchard," he suggested.

"Certainly," she responded.

She was looking at me as she spoke, and I seemed to read in her eyes a message that I was on no account to intervene. Not that I was in a fit state to do so, for my brain was a vortex. Was Ann really smitten with the fellow? Or had she perhaps some scheme at the back of her mind? Already they had moved to the door, as I stood motionless beside the chair of Mademoiselle Vallier, recording with a queer detachment that she was finding it difficult to control her feelings.

The door closed, and, like an automaton, I sat down again. I found, however, to my relief that Mademoiselle Vallier had lost all interest in me. She had risen from the table and was speaking urgently to Moussorsky by the window in some language which I could not understand. Presently he crossed the room and pressed a bell. The two servants entered almost immediately and wheeled away the luncheon table, while Moussorsky and his partner continued their conversation. Presently Mademoiselle Vallier left the room. Moussorsky then moved across to me, and sat down. I wondered what on earth he was going to say. He looked at me sullenly for a moment.

"The Englishman, Shelley," he began abruptly. "He was a great poet, is it not so?"

I was less surprised than I might have been by this sudden plunge into English literature, for my mind was not on what he said but on what was happening in the garden outside. What was Wyndham doing? What was he saying to Ann? My mind went back to their conversation in the train. She obviously liked the fellow and would find it difficult to believe that he was a Flamboy. Besides, she knew nothing about the Flamboys—had never heard of them.

"Yes," I said absently. "Shelley was undoubtedly a great poet."

"He was more than that," said Moussorsky. "He was a great man. You English treated him badly. He died abroad. You do not understand a man like Shelley."

Clearly Ann was mistaken in Francis Wyndham. What sort of tale was he telling her at that moment as they strolled together under the trees? Perhaps he would not even trouble to lie to her? Would he not rather tell her the truth, come frankly into the open as the bold buccaneer, a modern *condottiere*, dazzle her with his lack of scruple, seek to win her by the virtuosity of his performance?

"No," I said. "Shelley is hardly our ideal of a respectable Englishman. He was to our way of thinking a little queer."

"Queer," said Moussorsky, "that is always the English word. But it is the queer people who move the world as you will find to your cost."

I could not see Ann from where I stood by the window. The apple tree in which I had hid that morning obscured the view. This was a bedlam into which I had fallen — Wyndham with his lazy passion for style, and the madman beside me who mouthed his belief in the disciple of Godwin. What was Wyndham doing in the garden? What was he saying to Ann?

"Shelley was a great man as well as a great poet," Mousorsky continued. "He knew the masses and the hearts of the toiling millions:

Kings, priests and statesmen blast the human flower,
Even in its tender beauty, their influence darts
Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins
Of desolate society."

I stared at the man. My attention was caught at last

and I was amazed to perceive how strongly he was moved. His eyes were gleaming and his uncouth frame, in its monstrously ill-fitting clothes, shook with emotion, which he found it impossible adequately to express. I realised with a shock that these ecstasies were infinitely more dangerous than the clumsy pistol which he carried in his pocket. The man was sincere. For him, massacres and the tragical ends of princes, or overthrow of all the modern structure of the world, were the only solution of human existence. I began at that moment to realise the terrible power active in any reformer, whether he be Mohammed, Savonarola, or John Wesley, and in the emotion of that great sprawling brute I perceived a shadow of the force which had enthroned Lenin in the kremlin above the smoking ruins of Holy Russia.

But here at last was Ann, with Wyndham, at the door. She had a hand upon his arm.

"I will take your advice," she was saying. "I still have a slight headache, and would like to rest."

"Through here," said Wyndham. "I can recommend the divan. I've even slept upon it."

He led her across the room as he spoke and slid back one of the glass doors, disclosing part of the room beyond, which was furnished with armchairs and a large comfortable looking sofa with cushions.

I had risen from my chair on her entry.

"Ann," I said as she passed, "is there nothing I can do?"

She looked at me with a smile at the futility of my remark.

"I don't think so," she said coolly. "I have everything I want, thank you. Mr. Wyndham is most kind."

She gave him a smile as she spoke, and he bent and kissed her hand as she passed into the room adjacent. Confound and damn the fellow.

He closed the sliding doors. His eyes were bright and a little smile kept going and coming on his lips. He came towards us with a slight exaggeration of the willowy swagger with which he usually moved.

"And now," he said, "to business."

He crossed the room as he spoke and, unlocking a writing table, drew out a portfolio and opened it. At that moment, however, there came a knock on the door and, before Moussorsky had time to do more than growl, it opened abruptly.

A man was standing on the threshold. I recognised him at once. It was, again, Dumont. He held in his hand a buff-coloured envelope which I also recognised. He was still in the uniform of Aspaleia, and stood for a moment enjoying the mild sensation he had created by his entry. Then he came forward to Moussorsky.

"Comrade," he began, but at that moment he caught sight of me.

"Hullo!" he said genially. "Do I perceive the English pig that deprived me so forcibly of this?"

He waved in the air as he spoke the envelope which I had handed that morning to the Prime Minister of Roumania.

"Apparently you do," said Wyndham. "The recognition appears to be mutual. But what have you there?" and he stretched out his hand for the envelope.

"There," said the man triumphantly, "are the secret dispatches that were taken this morning to Radulara."

CHAPTER XII

I AM A SILENT WITNESS

Wyndham opened the buff-coloured envelope and examined its contents in silence. Then he passed them over to Moussorsky.

"The plans of the well, comrade," he said, "and some interesting information about the mysterious McGuffie. It seems my reading of the situation was correct, though I had no idea we were dealing with the celebrated Colonel Granby."

"Who is Colonel Granby?" grumbled Moussorsky, turning over the papers. "Never heard of him."

"His ways are mysterious," said Wyndham, "but I know that he did a great deal for the British Government in the Balkans during the war. You will also note that Mr. Baxter is rather more closely involved in this business than we supposed. He is, in fact, an accredited go-between between Colonel Granby and Radulara."

Moussorsky put down the papers.

"Does this change the programme in any way?" he inquired.

"How do you mean?" asked Wyndham.

"We've got the plans and can show them to Dubosc ourselves. There's no need to go on with this masquerade. We can keep the girl till the whole business is settled and dispose of Granby and Baxter straightaway."

This Moussorsky was a pleasant fellow. His words conjured up visions of the Russian Terror—men and women packed tight in open motor lorries, the modern

equivalent to the tumbrils, creaking from the horrors of the Lubjanka to the yawning common grave in the outskirts of Moscow, the pistol shot in the back of the head as they stumbled one by one over the tailboard.

Wyndham considered Moussorsky's suggestion.

"No," he said at last. "I hardly think that would do. Neither you nor I, comrade, know anything about oil, and I can't help feeling that Colonel Granby, thorough artist that he is, has got the subject at his fingers' ends. Between ourselves I couldn't hope to stand up against an expert cross-examination on those plans and figures. The false McGuffie must himself hand the plans to Dubosc and give him the necessary explanations."

"But as soon as he sees the plans," protested Mousorsky, "he will know that we have got the other papers as well and that we've seen through his disguise."

"Not at all," said Wyndham. "I shall tell him we have recovered the plans, but I shall make no reference to the other papers. Colonel Granby will, therefore, not know for certain that he is unmasked. It will be interesting to see how he behaves. I will take fifty to one that he continues his impersonation. That is what I should undoubtedly do myself, and Colonel Granby is a man in whom I begin to detect a kindred spirit. He loves the game for its own sake. It will be a pleasure to renew his acquaintance. Mr. Baxter is, I am sure, equally anxious to witness the performance, and he is too good a sportsman and too well aware of your hasty and impulsive disposition, comrade, to interfere with our proceedings."

"I'll see to it that he doesn't interfere," growled Mousorsky.

Wyndham during his last observations had sorted the papers in the buff envelope. The plans he laid on the table, while he put the dispatches concerning Granby and myself away in his pocket, the sound of a car drawing up

outside the house causing him slightly to hasten his preparations.

"One other point," he added, turning to me abruptly. "Should you at any time feel tempted to interfere in the coming interview, you will please remember that you are not the only person who may suffer."

He looked significantly as he spoke towards the sliding doors behind which Ann was resting. The gesture and the threat it implied opened my eyes. I saw him at last as he really was, stripped of his gallant airs, a sordid and cynical adventurer.

I half rose from my chair.

"You cad," I exclaimed, in the best tradition of the Surrey side, and I might have added in the same vein: You are an out-and-out bounder and a scoundrel.

Wyndham shrugged his shoulders lightly.

"Beware of the moral *cliché*, Baxter, and study the lives of the great. You will find that there is scarcely one of them who would not be described as a cad by the first nonentity he met in any good club in London."

The door opened as he said the last word, and Toliu came in, very spick and span, his little black moustache quivering with excitement. He was closely followed by Mr. McGuffie, carrying a small and very shabby dispatch case. For a moment Mr. McGuffie stood near the door, peering suspiciously about him. Then suddenly he saw me, but showed no very great surprise. Moussorsky was watching us both, and in his coat pocket, I was aware of a slight bulge protruding in my direction. The excitement of the situation fell from me like a cloak and I suddenly felt very downcast and inefficient.

Why had Granby returned? Surely he already knew enough of the Flamboys and their schemes. Four of them were now identified — Wyndham, Moussorsky, Toliu and the person, name of Ciuntu, who in Roumania was ginger-

ing up the peasants. It was true that we had yet to find the fifth of these mysterious individuals. But surely we knew enough to justify prompt and immediate action for the rescue of the King.

Meanwhile, I was keenly conscious of the disapproving eye of Angus McGuffie.

"Here again, laddie?" he said. "I was beginning to doubt ye had been getting into mischief."

Wyndham hastened to interpose with a smile which he took no trouble to conceal.

"Let me explain," he said. "We found your secretary in the garden. It seems that you instructed him to arrange, if possible, to be a witness of our interview this morning. I'm sorry you should have had so little confidence in our good intentions, Mr. McGuffie. But on the whole I can quite understand your misgivings. Our conduct may well have seemed just a little — er — ambiguous. Mr. Baxter, like the faithful secretary he is, obeyed your instructions. We found him in the apple tree. He is an excellent fellow. He not only accounted quite satisfactorily for his eaves-dropping, but gave us an opportunity of convincing him of our cordial appreciation of yourself. As a token of our good faith we invited him to lunch and arranged for him to be present to greet you on your return to our conference."

I groaned inwardly. Granby was in the toils. I could not warn him. And what would be the use if I did?

"Is this true, laddie?" he asked.

"Substantially, sir," I replied.

"Henceforth," continued Wyndham, "I hope you will give us your entire confidence, Mr. McGuffie. As one of the Five — well, need I say more? *Noblesse oblige.*"

He was watching Granby intently as he spoke, but the dour, impassive countenance of Mr. McGuffie did not change. He was, it seemed, one of the Flamboys — the

missing member of the group. He received his initiation without a quiver.

"Well, Mr. Wyndham," he said, "nothing could be fairer than that. I accept your kind assurances in the spirit in which they are offered, and I suggest we get down to the business in hand."

"Please sit down, gentlemen," said Wyndham.

There was a shuffling of chairs. Granby opened his bag and began to go through it in the methodical manner of a lawyer's clerk.

"Weel, Mr. Wyndham," he said. "I've been doing my best for ye in the matter of the plans. I think I can show Dubosc something that will pass muster."

He produced a sheaf of papers which Wyndham smilingly waved aside.

"Those papers will not happily be necessary, Mr. McGuffie," he said. "We have recovered the plans."

Mr. McGuffie stared at Wyndham for a moment. Then his face lit with appreciation.

"Ye don't say so, Mr. Wyndham."

Wyndham indicated the papers on the table in front of him.

"They reached Radulara early this morning. I'm afraid he will miss them rather badly — particularly if he also should have been seized with the same idea as ourselves of seeking support with a banker."

"And how did ye recover them, may I ask?"

"It was not very difficult. Radulara was so nervous about them that he carried them separately from his other papers — on his own person, in fact. His Excellency is a difficult subject for a pickpocket. He is always so well wrapt up. But our agent is an expert."

Had Granby any suspicions that his secret was known I could not tell from his face. Wyndham was lying well. He had suggested, as directly as he could, that, though he

had recovered the plans, he had not seen any of the dispatches from London.

There was a slight pause. Every one in the room was looking at Granby, including myself, and, if ever man tried to broadcast speechless messages with his eyes, it was certainly me. *They've got you, old man, they've got you.* The silence seemed to be shrieking words of warning. Then suddenly I caught sight of myself in the mirror above the fireplace. There was nothing to indicate all this inner disturbance. I was just a little red in the face. So much for telepathy.

Granby, next to Wyndham, was sitting motionless, his hands on the dispatch case in front of him. Somewhere a clock ticked, and outside came the thin cheep of two sparrows quarrelling. The afternoon sunlight poured through the window, and lay in a golden pool on the floor.

"I'm glad you've got the plans," said Mr. McGuffie at last, as though quite unconscious of the inspection to which he was being subjected. "But perhaps ye will kindly tell me now, gentlemen, what I am to say to Dubosc. How far is he to be regarded as in our confidence?"

"That will be easy," growled Moussorsky. "You'll talk to him about the well. That's your ticket. You can leave the rest to us."

"Ay, ay — that will suit me very well," said Mr. McGuffie. "I'm no wishful to put ma foot in it."

Wyndham smiled.

"That, if I may say so, Mr. Guffie, is an excellent frame of mind. I hope our comrade Moussorsky will be equally discreet. I'm not at all sure that he ought not to change his tie. We've agreed that Dubosc won't dare to commit his bank unless he is quite sure that nothing will be breathed of the arrangement with Moscow."

Moussorsky raised a defensive hand to the flaming symbol of his faith.

"Moscow," he thundered, "is the kernel of the plan."

"True, comrade. But the nut has yet to be cracked. We all know what bankers are, and there must be no question of opening any door to Soviet Russia till we have got the cash and until the revolution has gone too far to be checked. We settled all that long ago. Remember also that if our connection with Moscow is published, the revolution is unlikely to go very far. Toliu has repeatedly emphasised that we haven't a hope of success if the peasants get wind of Russia."

"I hope they have not pushed those two corps too close to the frontier," murmured Toliu apprehensively. "It would complicate things for Ciuntu."

"You needn't worry about that," put in Moussorsky. "The corps are not within two days' march of the frontier and they are well hidden. Not a word has been allowed to get out. The whole thing is a dark secret. Moscow has seen to that."

Wyndham raised a slim hand.

"There is the car," he said. "Dubosc has arrived. With your permission, gentlemen, I will speak for you all."

"One moment," said Mr. McGuffie. "Is yon laddie to be present at the interview?"

He pointed a lean finger at me as he spoke.

Wyndham nodded pleasantly.

"Just as you please, Mr. McGuffie," he said. "We no longer have any secrets from Mr. Baxter. Moussorsky, give Mr. Baxter a more comfortable chair, the one beside you, perhaps."

I moved forward into the circle and every one rose, as the door opened and a little man very Swiss in appearance, with a round face and red cheeks, appeared on the threshold. He was dressed in a short black coat and striped

trousers. He was clean shaven, and at first sight had the honest, harmless look of the prosperous tradesman. But there were pouches and lines under his eyes, and the eyes themselves were small and restless.

He advanced quickly into the room and produced a small portfolio, which he laid on the table. There was a good deal of bowing and shaking of hands, in the course of which Mr. McGuffie was presented. It was Wyndham who performed that office.

"This is Mr. McGuffie," he said, laying a friendly hand on Granby's arm. "He has come over specially from England to show you the all-important plans of the Ortania well and to give you all the necessary information. I need hardly assure you that Mr. McGuffie is an expert."

We all sat down again.

"And now," said Wyndham briskly, "we are busy men and I suggest we come straight to the point."

He pushed a cigar box across the table towards Dubosc as he spoke.

"Mr. McGuffie will show you the plans of the Ortania well, and we will then invite you to take a decision."

Monsieur Dubosc extended a plump hand.

"One moment, gentlemen," he said, "we cannot go quite so fast as that. I have had bad news, news which alters the whole situation. I shall have to withdraw from this affair."

"Withdraw?" echoed Toliu.

"What?" exclaimed Moussorsky.

"Indeed," said Wyndham, smoothly.

"I have had bad news," repeated Dubosc. "As you may well believe in a small city like Geneva everybody more or less knows everybody else's business, and I have just heard on good authority—from a clerk in the office in fact, who is under obligations to me—that the Prime Minister of Roumania, here in Geneva, has started

negotiations for a loan on behalf of his Government with the well-known and highly respectable firm of Gemusier et fils."

Toliu smiled wanly.

"My dear sir," he protested. "It is common knowledge that the present government of Roumania has been trying unsuccessfully to float a foreign loan for the last six months. This further attempt will merely be added to the long list of their previous failures."

"Are you so sure of that, Monsieur Toliu?" asked Dubosc sharply. "My information is pretty definite, and I am told that Radulara is offering as part security for the loan a new oil well which has just been discovered. He is even said to have shown Gemusier the plans of the well and given him full particulars as to output and possibilities of exploitation. Now, gentlemen, you must be frank. Is this well of which Radulara has the plans, the Ortania well, or is it not?"

There was a moment's silence.

"I know nothing of the source of your information," said Wyndham at last, "and I cannot, therefore, judge of its reliability. Radulara may, as you say, be trying to negotiate a loan and he may be offering a well as security. I can only tell you the facts as we know them. The plans which we are about to show you have never been out of the possession of our friend Mr. McGuffie until this morning, when they were handed over to us. They are the only plans in existence, and the only evidence, so far as we know, of the position and value of the well at Ortania. Radulara is in urgent need of money. Whether he has heard of our discovery and is endeavouring to exploit it with forged or duplicate papers, I cannot say. I only know that Mr. McGuffie will soon be able to satisfy you that these plans here on the table are genuine, and that without them Radulara will be unable to convince

any expert prospector either that the well exists or that its output is likely to make it adequate security for a loan."

Dubosc listened attentively and seemed, provisionally at least, to accept these assurances. Then, clearing his throat, he began again.

"There is another thing," he said. "You have the plans of the well; but I must have also an adequate assurance that you will be able to control it and issue the necessary concessions within the next fortnight. That is my utmost limit. Within a fortnight I must be able to show these papers to my directors as the plans of a well under your direction and control."

"Naturally," said Wyndham coolly. "The Ortania well can only be exploited with the consent of the Roumanian Government. I guarantee that well within the fortnight you mention Monsieur Toliu will be Prime Minister of Roumania."

"It is a considerable risk I am taking, gentlemen," said Dubosc with a haggard smile.

"The reward, Mr. Dubosc, is also considerable," said Wyndham softly, "and in your case even necessary. As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb."

He looked hard at Dubosc whose eyes shifted uneasily.

"Even though the revolution succeeds," continued Dubosc, "and I can show my directors that by the exercise of a little — er — political foresight I have done a wonderful good stroke of business for the bank, they will probably be inclined to censure my rashness in advancing money on these plans before the parties possessing them were in effective control of the situation. Only complete and immediate success can justify the step I am taking."

"We quite realise your position, Mr. Dubosc," said Wyndham. "You have the plans before you, and we

guarantee the revolution. It is for you to decide whether the game is worth the candle."

Dubosc had gone very white and he seemed to have some difficulty in speaking.

"Show me the plans," he said at last.

Wyndham took the plans from Mr. McGuffie, who, knowing no French, had been listening with interest to the conversation, and pushed them over to Dubosc who examined them rapidly. The others watched him in silence. Presently he laid the papers down.

"If these plans are correct," he said, "the advance of three hundred fifty thousand Swiss francs for which you ask represents not one-hundredth part of the capital value of the exploitation. How do you propose to — er — reward me for my — er — good offices?"

Plain speaking with a vengeance. So this was how business was conducted in the best circles.

"We will arrange for you to be assigned a large block of shares in the new company," said Wyndham. "More than enough to cover your losses and commitments during the last twelve months."

Dubosc was silent for a moment staring in front of him.

"Come, Mr. Dubosc," said Wyndham, and he spoke in what might almost be described as a bedside manner, "it is too late now to withdraw. Your personal position, as I happen to know, is — but we need not go into that. This is the only chance you will ever get to put things right. You have, I think, taken graver risks within the last six months than sanctioning an advance from your bank on a thoroughly adequate security."

Dubosc went, if possible, whiter than before, and for a moment I thought he would collapse in his chair. But with a great effort he pulled himself together.

"Remember," he said, "I shall have to face my board

within a fortnight, in ten days' time to be exact. How soon can the well be under your control?"

Toliu leaned forward excitedly.

"The revolution will be complete," he said, "within four days at most from the opening move."

"And what will it be, this opening move?" inquired Dubosc with the air of a man who feared the answer.

"The publication in Roumania of the news that the present Roumanian Government have allowed the King to be abducted," Toliu replied.

He looked, as he spoke, at his colleagues, and Wyndham nodded slightly.

"That is an extreme measure and may be difficult to arrange," said Dubosc uneasily.

Wyndham smiled.

"Let me set your mind at rest," he replied. "But please regard what I am about to tell you as for the moment confidential."

The banker nodded.

"The first step has already been taken," said Wyndham, speaking slowly and distinctly. "King Peter of Roumania was abducted yesterday and is at the present moment in our custody."

Dubosc leaned back heavily in his chair.

"I am no politician," he protested, "and I am not a party to any of your measures. I know nothing of these arrangements, gentlemen. Do you understand?"

"The news of the King's abduction," continued Wyndham inexorably, "will be the signal for the revolution to break out. As you know, the present government in Roumania is far from popular, and their loss of the King, for that is how it will be put, will bring them down with a crash."

"When will you publish the news of the — er — event to which you allude?"

Wyndham looked whimsically at the banker.

"That rather depends on yourself, Monsieur Dubosc," he said. "As soon as the fact is known we must act swiftly and effectually. We can do nothing, however, until you have advanced us the necessary funds."

Still the banker hesitated. He passed a fat hand over his forehead, smoothing away the beads of sweat.

"There is one other point," he said. "There have been rumours of a movement of the Red troops in Russia."

The eyes of Toliu went expressionless, and Moussorsky shuffled in his chair.

"Do you assure me, gentlemen," continued Dubosc, "that your sole aim is to upset the present Roumanian government with the object of exploiting the country in your turn? There is not, I mean, any question of an intervention of the Soviets?"

Wyndham graciously waved his hand in the direction of Toliu.

"There," he said, "is the future Prime Minister of Roumania. He hardly, I think, suggests red ruin and the breaking up of laws."

Dubosc looked doubtfully at the neat little man who was to control the destinies of his country.

"I must have a positive assurance on this point," he continued. "You will understand that, if there is any question of Soviet troops entering the country or the door being opened to Russia, I shouldn't stand a chance with my directors. Nor should I feel that even my own share of the — er — reward was safe."

"Set your mind at rest, Monsieur Dubosc," said Wyndham. "The mere suspicion of any possible interference from Russia would destroy our revolution at the outset. We are relying mainly on the peasants, who would be the first to take alarm. Breathe a single word of Soviet intervention and we retire from business at once."

The banker darted a frightened look at Wyndham.

"Suppose Radulara, realising this, should for his own purposes encourage the rumour that Soviet Russia may intervene," he said.

A hoarse voice broke in upon the Conference. Mousorsky was in high passion, the veins standing out in his thick neck, his enormous hands clenched on the table.

"It would be his final word," he said. "He would never speak again."

"Radulara will do no such thing," said Wyndham smoothly. "He can hardly as a responsible statesman encourage a rumour which is so obviously without foundation."

Dubosc looked uneasily from Wyndham to the smouldering Moussorsky, and back again. Then he began to finger the plans in front of him.

"I must have a short talk with Mr. McGuffie," he said at last. "I am not a trained engineer, and there are several points here which I do not understand."

"Of course," said Wyndham, "Mr. McGuffie is at your disposal."

Granby rose and retired with the banker to the end of the table. They sat down and began to examine the plans together, while the three men at the other end of the table carried on a conversation in Russian or Roumanian which, as far as I was concerned, might have been Greek or Sanscrit.

I did not catch much of what Granby was saying. Such words as "output" and "daily flow" reached me from time to time. In about five minutes the banker stood up. The others turned to him eagerly.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "what Mr. McGuffie has shown me is satisfactory. It confirms the information you have already placed at my disposal. I shall have no dif-

ficulty with my board so far as this is purely a matter of business."

Wyndham rose.

"Then we may regard the matter as settled," he said. "For you, Monsieur Dubosc, and, of course, for your directors, this is and will remain purely a matter of business. You may leave the rest to us."

Dubosc walked to his old place at the table and unlocking his portfolio, drew from it a thin packet.

"I've brought it in notes," he said. "You'd better count them," and he pushed the packet over to Toliu.

I don't know how the others felt about it, but I am not a business man and I was certainly impressed.

"I shall require a receipt," added Dubosc, "signed by Monsieur Toliu on behalf of his Government."

Toliu, his eyes shining with excitement, pulled a single sheet of paper from a folder in front of him. He wrote a receipt and signed it with a flourish.

The banker took the receipt from Toliu and examined it carefully.

"I see you call yourself the Ortania Well Company, Limited," he said.

"For the present," said Toliu. "It sounds better than Provisional Government, don't you think?"

The banker nodded.

"Certainly," he answered.

"I am to take it then," said Dubosc, "that you will now publish the news of the King's abduction."

"Of course," assented Toliu.

Dubosc sighed with relief. He had taken the plunge and his decision had put him for the moment out of his misery.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I must be going. I have a considerable number of engagements this afternoon."

We all rose. With much bowing and handshaking the banker was ushered out of the room, and I heard him drive away in his car.

Toliu, who had accompanied him to the door, turned back to the table.

"Well," he said, "now we can get busy."

"One moment," muttered Wyndham. "There is just one question I would like to put to our friend, Mr. McGuffie."

Granby looked warily at the speaker.

"Is that so, Mr. Wyndham?" he asked. "I need hardly say that I am entirely at your disposition. What is it ye wish to know?"

"Would you explain to us, Mr. McGuffie, how you came to be murdered three days ago?"

CHAPTER XIII

I AM PUSHED THROUGH THE WINDOW

Granby rose quietly to his feet and moved back a pace from the table, which brought him both nearer to me and to the window.

"Put 'em up," said Moussorsky sharply. "Put 'em up."

The automatic had left his pocket and was levelled, impartially, in our direction. Granby raised his hands. He was not dressed for a hero and would have cut a purely ridiculous figure in his morning coat and striped trousers, with his silk hat on the table in front of him, but for his eyes. The attitude was not unlike that of a minister supplicating heaven, but the mask of Angus McGuffie had fallen from him and the expression on his face was dangerously alert.

"Is it possible," he said, with a touch of mockery in his voice, "that you have begun to doubt my identity?"

Little Toliu, looking bewilderedly from Granby to Wyndham and back again, reminded me of Tenniel's dormouse at the teaparty. I had forgotten, for the moment, that he knew nothing of the impersonation.

Wyndham laid a hand on his arm.

"Toliu," he said, "I'm afraid this is even more of a surprise for you than for Colonel Granby."

"Colonel Granby?" echoed Toliu. "What do you mean? This is Mr. Angus McGuffie."

"No," said Wyndham. "The gentleman opposite is not Mr. McGuffie, but a rather more interesting and attrac-

tive personage. He is Colonel Alistair Granby of the British Intelligence Service. The real Mr. McGuffie was murdered by Petrano last Thursday. The papers which came to Lausanne this morning along with the plans of the well will explain everything."

He took from his pocket the papers he had removed from the buff envelope and handed them to Toliu.

There was a short silence while the future Prime Minister of Roumania examined the papers. At last he laid them on the table.

"Gentlemen," he said solemnly, "we have been deceived."

Toliu, you perceive, had the statesman's talent for the obvious.

"My friends," came the voice of Granby, "this attitude of benediction is rather fatiguing, and your comrade with the red tie is not nearly so impressive as he thinks."

"Quite so," said Wyndham. "But Mr. Moussorsky has a weakness for the picturesque. I suggest that he just satisfy himself that you are unarmed and that we then discuss the situation over a friendly glass."

Moussorsky, automatic in hand, approached and ran through Granby's pockets. A small revolver was discovered and laid upon the table.

"Won't you sit down, Colonel Granby?" said Wyndham, indicating a chair.

"Thank you," said Granby equably, putting his hands in his pockets. "I would rather stand, if you don't mind."

"As you please," said Wyndham. "But not quite so close to the window."

Granby moved obediently.

Toliu was again studying the papers. He looked at his colleagues over the edge of them.

"But this is serious," he said, his little brown eyes bulging with apprehension. "This Colonel Granby is of

the British Government. He cannot be acting alone. The police may be here at any moment."

"Perhaps," said Wynham lightly, "but I rather fancy that Colonel Granby is more subtle than that. His object in coming here was not to have us arrested, but to obtain information. That is his job. Is it not so, Colonel?"

"That is my job," said Granby. "But in the exercise of my profession, though we are expected to take risks, we are not forbidden to take precautions."

"Let us put two and two together," suggested Wyndham.

"By all means," said Granby. "But I hope you're better at figures than I am."

"Hitherto," continued Wyndham, "I've wondered why Mr. Baxter should have been so anxious to intrude upon us this morning. The reason now begins to be obvious. He desired to warn you of the possible difficulty of your position, Colonel Granby. That rather suggests that the police are unlikely to be taking any very active interest in your proceedings. It remains for us to determine whether you have had recourse to them in the luncheon interval as a result of what you saw and heard at our first meeting. There perhaps Toliu can advise us."

"I was with him the whole time," said Toliu. "We even lunched together."

"Macaroni and milk pudding," murmured Granby, "and he calls it lunch."

"Very well, my dear Toliu," Wyndham pursued. "If you were with Colonel Granby the whole time, as you say, he could not have communicated with the police. I feel, moreover, that such a course would not somehow recommend itself to Colonel Granby. It is not in his character."

Toliu looked doubtfully at Granby for a moment. But it was Moussorsky who spoke.

"Why not ask the man himself?" he suggested.

Granby looked at him with a pleasant smile.

"Ask me by all means," he said. "But I must warn you that I haven't yet decided what to answer. Shall I tell you, for example, that I have warned the police and that they will shortly be coming here to look for me? That might frighten you into releasing Mr. Baxter and myself upon terms satisfactory to us all. Or shall I say that I have never had anything whatever to do with the police and so lull you into a false security?"

Moussorsky thrust his automatic suddenly into Granby's ribs.

"You will tell us the truth," he said.

"Optimist," said Granby. "And please don't do that. I'm ticklish."

He moved negligently away from Moussorsky as he spoke.

"Meanwhile, gentlemen, I would remind you that I've been impersonating the late Angus McGuffie for nearly three days, and that a purely farinaceous diet, with chewing gum between meals, is lowering to the system. So what about that friendly glass? And will it contain, shall we say, a whisky and soda? I certainly deserve it. I've at least been instrumental in extracting three hundred and fifty thousand of the best from your friend Dubosc."

Wyndham laughed.

"I quite agree, Colonel," he said.

He touched a bell on the table and the door opened almost at once to admit Stepan, the "natural." He stood mouthing at us vacantly, but before any one had said anything he was pushed aside and the hard-faced Dumont took his place.

"You sent for me, Chief?" he asked, addressing himself to Wyndham.

"No," said Wyndham. "I merely wanted a whisky and soda. Let me, however, introduce you to Colonel Granby."

He turned to us pleasantly.

"This is Monsieur Dumont, who will be looking after you until further notice."

The hard-faced man smiled grimly.

"It will be a pleasure," he said with a malevolent look at me.

"Meanwhile," continued Wyndham, "you might send in Stepan with the whisky."

The man turned and left the room.

"Well, gentlemen," said Granby as the door closed. "I am always ready to face facts. You've got me and I don't imagine you intend to lose sight of me for the present. But what about my friend Baxter here?"

He moved as he spoke and laid a hand on my shoulder.

"You have nothing against him," Granby continued. "He got involved in this business purely by accident. Don't you think we might arrange for him to go free on certain conditions?"

"Conditions be damned," I interposed. "They can't release me unless I promise to say nothing of what I know."

"And how could we possibly accept such a promise, even if Mr. Baxter were prepared to make it," demanded Wyndham. "Mr. Baxter is a very active and enterprising young man, and he knows as much, and even a little more, than you do, Colonel. If we released Mr. Baxter he would at once hasten to repair his mistakes of this morning, including his very serious omission to warn His Excellency Radulara against certain of our colleagues who wear the uniform of Aspaleia. These representations on behalf of your friend, Colonel Granby, do more credit, if I may say so, to your good feelings than to your intelligence."

The door opened again as he spoke to admit Stepan, bearing on a tray a decanter of whisky, two syphons and some glasses. The tray was placed on a little table which stood full in the sun not far from the window. Wyndham rose.

"Let me pour you out some whisky, Colonel," he said.

"Please don't trouble," said Granby, crossing to the little table.

Moussorsky made to intercept him, but Wyndham reached forward to restrain his comrade, saying something to Moussorsky in a low tone.

"Very well," Moussorsky replied in what was intended for a whisper. "It may loosen his tongue perhaps."

I looked at the bottle and found it difficult not to smile. It was only three quarters full. Moussorsky was quite incorrigibly an optimist.

Granby had poured the whisky into a glass, which he held under the nozzle of one of the syphons. I noticed that there was but little water in it, but that the other syphon was quite full. His back was towards me, hiding the tray for a moment. I heard the squirt of soda water, followed by that curious sigh a syphon makes when it is empty.

"The death rattle," Granby murmured.

He turned round, holding a tumbler in which the liquid was conspicuously yellow.

"Cheerio," he said. "I will remember this good deed in your favour, and when the judge puts on the black cap there shall be a strong recommendation to mercy.

"Good strong whisky this," he continued, removing a half-empty tumbler from his lips.

"Not bad," said Wyndham.

Granby was wandering round the room, tumbler in hand.

"Well," he said, wheeling suddenly round, so that Toliu started nervously in his chair, "what is the next move, I wonder? Not that I'm in a hurry. In the words of Horatio, 'There's yet some liquor left'."

He smiled a little fatuously upon us all, and I looked at him in some dismay. Strong whisky on a stomach

lined with nothing better than a few shreds of macaroni seemed to be taking effect with fatal rapidity.

"Take your time, Colonel Granby," said Wyndham pleasantly. "You may be sure that nothing very violent or disconcerting is likely to happen to any of us this afternoon, unless, of course, our comrade Moussorsky in a fit of suppressed emotion, should happen to break a blood vessel. You and Mr. Baxter will stay quietly here. You may at a later stage prove useful as a hostage, in the event of the British Government being indisposed to recognise the future government of Roumania."

"Not a hope," said Granby in a sudden access of gloom. "In my profession an agent who gets caught must shift for himself. The service ceases to know him. His Majesty's government wouldn't trade me for a tumbler of this excellent whisky, which is, I perceive, no longer so full as it was."

"My dear fellow," said Wyndham genially.

He was watching as narrowly as myself but with very different feelings, the swift process of my friend's inebriation, and he crossed the room towards the little table as he spoke.

"You are too kind," said Granby with a suspicious accuracy of pronunciation from which I augured the worst.

"You are really too kind," he repeated, solemnly holding out his glass to Wyndham.

"Pre-war, too, by George."

This was the last straw. Myself and Ann in the toils and Granby fuddled.

I saw Wyndham cross the room and tilt the decanter. He seemed to tilt for some considerable time — two — three — four fingers. The tumbler was half-full of raw whisky.

"Steady the Buffs," said Granby. "I'm a m-moderate man — if you understand what I mean. And I think that

there should be a little more s-soda this time, if you don't mind."

"Certainly," said Wyndham, and putting the glass under the nozzle of the second syphon, as yet untouched and shining in the sunlight, he placed his hand on the lever.

At the same instant I felt the light pressure of Granby's fingers on my arm.

The gesture startled me, for it was not the act of a man who was seeking to steady himself. It sent a gentle but stimulating thrill of warning to my brain, and suddenly I was all alert, taking in every detail of the scene — Granby close beside me, the light streaming from the window full on the slim intent figure of Wyndham pressing the lever of the syphon.

He pressed it once and again.

Then, abruptly, came a loud report from the table, a sharp cry from Wyndham, and something hard hit me violently in the chest. The syphon had exploded.

I heard a voice in my ear.

"The window," said Granby, as I fell back bewildered and a little staggered by the blow on my chest.

I leapt for the long French window to my right and felt that Granby was beside me. I tore it open. There followed a deafening report from the room, and I saw that the other half of the window was shattered into small pieces.

"The automatic," I said to myself.

But Moussorsky, it seemed, was a poor marksman. I turned sharp to the left, as I ran through the window, instinctively bending low as I went. Moussorsky might try again. Then I stopped abruptly. Granby was lying on the ground halfway through the window. He had been tackled low by Wyndham who, with blood streaming from his face, had apparently not lost his presence of mind.

"Get along, you prize idiot," shouted Granby. "Straight

to Radulara. Warn him — the Soviets are in it — the Soviets.”

He was being dragged back as he spoke, and I caught sight of Moussorsky and Toliu struggling to get through the window over his body.

I waited for no more, but, taking to my heels, ran swiftly down the garden path and so into the road outside.

CHAPTER XIV

I TAKE TO THE BOTTLE

Under the hedge I marked time. What should I do? Go back and join the fight for the body? Clearly we should crash if I did. I was the forlorn hope, and pretty forlorn at that. Besides, Granby had given me my orders. Discipline, Baxter, discipline, I said to myself.

I started to run down the road and became aware of something heavy in the opening of my waistcoat where I had been hit when the syphon had exploded. I felt about and presently drew forth the metal nozzle of the syphon, and it was sticky. I glanced at it before throwing it away. The tube was neatly and effectively plugged with chewing gum.

So that was the explanation. And I thought Granby had been merely tight. During all that back chat with the Flamboys he had been quietly busy with the chewing gum of Angus McGuffie. A soda-water bottle with the outlet choked left in the sun had a fair chance of exploding when the lever was pressed and the gas expanded, and Granby had arranged for it to expand in the hands of Wyndham. One couldn't let a fellow like that down. His example spurred me on.

Not that I needed any spurring, for even as I took to my heels down the road, I heard footsteps behind me, and, glancing over my shoulder, I saw Dumont and at least one other man, in hot pursuit.

Keep cool, I said to myself as the sweat streamed down my forehead.

Somehow I must reach Radulara and warn him — warn him of two things. Put not your trust in Aspaleia and beware of Moscow.

Once more I looked over my shoulder, and saw, to my dismay, that the distance between my pursuers and myself had considerably lessened. Dumont was evidently a sprinter. There were now two other men behind. Out of the tail of my eye, I caught sight of Toliu, his silly little striped legs twinkling down the roadway. An incongruous memory of one of my suburban uncles, running for the nine twenty-two for London Bridge (first stop Clapham Junction) tickled me abruptly, and I began to giggle. Who was the tail hound — natural or deaf-mute? But the pace was rapidly becoming too hot to last. I had not had any sleep at all the night before, and practically none the night before that — for I can never sleep in the train — and my wind was not up to standard. I looked from side to side for some bolt hole or something which would give me a chance of getting ahead of my pursuers. Luckily they seemed to have given up shooting.

I was following the road which, after a turn or two, joined another road to Geneva, running from La Belotte through Cologny. At the junction of the two roads, opposite the lodge gates of a large and ugly house, built to resemble a mediæval fortress, I had a bit of luck. For there, propped against the iron gates, beside the lodge, was a bicycle with a tin sheet attached to the central bar, upon which I read the cheerful inscription: P. Bonhomme, Provisions. P. Bonhomme, or his representative, a tall lout, of the genus hayseed, was walking down the drive towards the lodge. Strapped to his shoulders was one of those large wicker baskets in which Continental errand boys carry the meat and cauliflowers.

I promptly seized the bicycle. P. Bonhomme, perceiving my incredibly illegal act, raised a shout, but by that time

I was in the saddle and pedalling for dear life in the direction of Cologny, with Dumont panting distressfully not twenty yards behind.

I looked round again, but a curve of the road already hid the hounds. I had gained a full fifty yards. My spirits rose, and I redoubled my efforts. That was my undoing, for I was on the steep incline that runs past the Mairie of Cologny and the Inn of the Golden Lion, to join the main asphalt road down beside the lake. The pace was unnecessarily fast, but neither of the brakes, jammed on as hard as they would go, had any appreciable effect, and just in front of me was a nasty bend in the hill. To complicate matters, the village dog, with the idiocy of its kind, bounded into the roadway as soon as it saw me and began prancing and barking close to my front wheel.

"Go away," I said. "I am not the errand boy."

I swerved to avoid the dog, and I swerved a little too far. It was just opposite the Inn of the Golden Lion that it happened. I struck the stone which stands in front of the doorway. It had been put there by some host of olden time to enable his less agile guests to mount their horses. For me it served the opposite purpose, and I shot over the handlebars, full on to the chest of the landlord of the Inn, who was taking the afternoon air at his own front door. He had served me with many a glass of the local wine, and this was an ill return. He crashed heavily to the ground. Being well provided by nature, he fell soft and, as I was fortunately on top, his remarks on the manner in which I had chosen to enter his inn were muffled by my waistcoat.

I rose to my feet and heard a shout, presumably of triumph, just behind me. The errand boy and Dumont, neck to neck and both red as beetroots, were within ten yards of me, while, considerably in their rear, but very determined, was Toliu and one of the servants. I sprang

over the prostrate innkeeper, who sat up just as I got free of him. A second crash and a further outbreak of language informed me that he had once more been laid low. I ran down the passage, past the little tap room, if I may call it so, to the kitchen, where Mrs. Innkeeper and Miss Innkeeper were preparing to find out what the noise was about and so by way of a short corridor, into the terrace or yard behind.

The terrace is famous in Geneva for its plane trees, its bowling alley and an exquisite view over the lake towards the Jura and Bellegarde. I had no time for the view, however, though it was showing its best. I would climb the iron railing at the end of the terrace, drop into the friendly shelter of the vines which ran up to it, and so continue my downward course for some hundreds of yards until I hit the main road below, which runs beside the lake into Geneva.

The railing at the end of the terrace crowns a low stone wall about two feet high. For a moment I thought I should be baffled. All the more so as in my haste I caught my foot in the leg of one of the many green painted iron tables on the terrace and stumbled to my hands and knees. I got up to find myself grasping a steel ball of the type which is used in the local game of bowls. With the ball in my right hand I made for the wall, jumped upon it and began to tackle the iron railing. I got one leg over the beastly thing when one of the spikes caught my trousers. Savagely I tore loose and, as I did so, caught sight of the errand boy. He was halfway across the yard and flushed with triumph.

"Dirty individual," he shouted, "thief, assassin of my velocipede."

But at that moment I launched the iron ball in his direction. It took him, I regret to say, below the belt and it laid him low. At the same moment my trousers finally

gave way, and I found myself on my back in the vines. Getting to my feet I started off down an alley heavy with leaf and grape. The vines stretched down the beautiful Mont Allègre, from which the house of the Flamboys took its name, to several private gardens belonging to the villas that hung just above the road.

The sight of the villas gave me a new idea. In one of them lived my friend Pickering and his family, and Pickering, by Jove, had a telephone. I looked at my watch. It was only just half-past four. It seemed to me that hours had passed in the house of the Flamboys. The Assembly would be meeting at five for the afternoon session, a full-dress, ceremonial debate at which Radulara could hardly fail to be present. I would telephone straight to the Salle de la Réformation where the Assembly was to meet, and then to the police.

I plunged down the long alleys of the vines with the gleaming lake at my feet and the dark Jura beyond.

I was hatless and my clothes were torn. Near the bottom I paused to take my bearings. The vines above me swayed and nestled. Shades of Endymion. These were my pursuers.

Like to a moving vintage down they came,
Crowned with green leaves and faces all on flame.

There were half a dozen villas below me, and I realised with something of a shock that I had not the slightest idea which one belonged to my friend Pickering. I had been there several times, but always after dark and in a motor car. Obviously I could not afford to waste time running from villa to villa, especially as further ominous wavings and cracklings in the alleys above me showed me that Bacchus and his crew were hard upon my heels. They had apparently spread out and were drawing the vines like a pack of beagles after a hare. I set my teeth.

They should not catch me squatting. I moved forward again, but was soon brought to an abrupt halt. Further progress was barred by a steep drop from the side of the vineyard into a narrow winding lane. It was at least a twenty-foot fall with a hard surface to land upon, and from where I stood it seemed difficult, if not impossible, to jump down without hurting myself.

I turned sharp to the right and ran parallel to the stone drop. I could not go fast, for now I was crossing alleys of vines instead of running down them, and the vines were in this part trained on low wire supports. Suddenly, with astounding distinctness I heard a shout behind me. It was little Toliu, and Dumont appeared beside him, not five yards away. In desperation I ran to the brink of the stone drop. It was a little lower here and I could see, barely a hundred yards away, the main road beside the lake. I dropped to my knees and lowered myself over the edge and hung on with my hands, my face to the wall. Suddenly my left wrist was clutched in a firm grip. There was a sound of heavy breathing and a red face was thrust almost into mine.

"I have you," said Dumont.

"Then come along, old boy," I said, and let go abruptly with my right hand.

There was a sound of ripping cloth and the body of Dumont leaned dangerously over the stone parapet. Either he must let go or pitch head foremost after me into the road. He let go. I fell to the ground, scraping my knees and elbows against the wall and alighting with a shock in the lane below, winded and jarred. I did not seem to have broken anything, however, and I presently staggered off down the steep hill.

What next? Perhaps I might be able to stop a passing car and get a lift into Geneva. Or perhaps I might find a boat on the lakeside and take to the water.

I stood for a moment at the end of the lane looking eagerly to right and left. No car was in sight. From up the hill came a scrambling sound, followed by a cry and a heavy thud. One at least of my pursuers had reached the lane.

At that moment came another and a more welcome sound. Down the main road, with a clang of bells, a tram was moving swiftly towards me, and, as it approached the corner where I was standing, I ran to board it. It was, I saw, entirely empty, except for the driver, though it bore the legend *Compleat* upon its painted side. It was towing a truck full of earth, inscribed: Public Works Department. The driver slowed down, with much ringing of his bell to give warning of his approach to the blind lane. I waited till the tram had passed me. Then I leapt for the rear of the truck and, getting my foot on a coupling, swung myself on to the top of the earth, just as Dumont, Toliu and the natural appeared in the mouth of the lane. The inn-keeper was seated, like Humpty Dumpty, on the stone wall, arguing the question of his descent with the errand boy.

My pursuers pulled up short at the sight of me safely installed upon the truck. An enormous elation possessed me. I waved my hand and sat back on the earth. The tram had gathered speed and was rattling along at a good pace. Dumont and his companions began to run in my direction but already I was a hundred yards to the good and it seemed a pretty hopeless task.

Then, just as I was congratulating myself on my good luck, the sound of a bell, striking a different note this time, fell upon my ears, and another tram, an ordinary one, bound for Geneva, hove into sight round a slight bend in the road. My pursuers leapt for it instantly, and so we all proceeded, like characters in a film chase, except that, unlike Harold Lloyd and the masters in that kind, we none

of us had any means of influencing the rate or direction of our locomotion.

I found myself repeating:

There was a young fellow said damn,
I find that free will is a sham.
I'm a creature that moves
In predestinate grooves —
Not even a bus but a tram.

Should I defy destiny and take again to the road? I decided not to do so for several reasons. First the tram was doing a good twenty miles an hour. Secondly, every yard nearer to Geneva was to my advantage. Thirdly, the tram in which Dumont and his friends were riding would have to stop from time to time to set down and pick up passengers, whereas mine, being engaged upon public works, would presumably only stop when it reached the works in question. Fervently I prayed that it might be bound for the heart of Geneva.

But alas! my prayer was unheeded. After running briskly for half a mile or so it approached a small siding just opposite the entrance to the Parc des Eaux Vives, where large excavations in the roadway revealed the destination of the earth upon which I was sitting. The tram stopped dead, and then began to move slowly backwards while I heard the voice of the driver exclaim: "Attention to the grand manœuvre."

I slipped from the truck and saw that the tram containing Dumont and his company was about two hundred yards away. I was now already in the outskirts of Geneva, not half a mile from the Salle de la Réformation, where the Assembly was meeting, and within sight of the cafés that fringe the quais. There was not, however, a taxi to be seen.

I broke once more into a run, making towards the

lakeside. Since there was no taxi to be had, I thought once again of the telephone. I had but to reach a café, put a call through to the Salle de la Réformation, warn Radulara, and summon the police.

I sprinted towards the Café des Marins, which is situated on the Quai des Eaux Vives. It is a corner house, one side of it fronting the Quai and the other giving upon a little street running at right angles. I pushed through a knot of loafers in the doorway, hoping that *my* grand manœuvre would not be perceived.

The café was small, each table being divided from the rest by wooden settees rising to a height of some six or seven feet. The bar was at the further end where the *patronne* was seated.

"Madame," I said, "have you a telephone?"

"This way, Monsieur," she replied.

I passed behind the bar and was led through a small glass door into a draughty little passage. Projecting from the wall there was a telephone. I took down the receiver, deciding, as I did so, to ring up the offices of the Secretariat. That would be quicker than trying to get through to the Salle de la Réformation, where the confusion behind the scenes during the meeting of the Assembly is considerable. I would telephone direct to the private secretary of the Secretary General himself.

I gave the number and waited for the communication, glancing from time to time apprehensively along the passage. My rear appeared to be adequately protected by the broad back of the *patronne* standing at her bar. The other end of the passage opened, I perceived, on to a side street and the door was ajar. Through it I saw something which for the moment caused me to imagine that it was I and not Granby who had consumed the pre-war whisky of our friend Wyndham. Before my incredulous eyes, standing bravely in the gutter, were four gigantic bottles. They

were about eight feet high, garishly painted, and each of them bore a large label to the following effect.

DR. PERROT'S QUINQUINA. A DIGESTIVE TONIC.
THE EMPRESS OF APÉRITIFS. BE HEALTHY

Underneath in small letters was a long list of diseases, ranging from backache to flat feet, infallibly to be cured by this excellent beverage.

I took in these details subconsciously, as the voice of the telephone operator informed me that my number was engaged.

"Impossible," I said in desperation. "I am asking for the Secretariat of the League of Nations. They have surely got more than one line?"

"They have twenty-four lines," replied the operator, "and they are all engaged. I will try to ring you when one of them is free, but I cannot undertake to do so. We are very busy to-day."

The telephone exchange in Geneva is always polite and, whenever possible, efficient.

I hung up the receiver and, after a moment's thought, went softly down the passage to the back door and looked cautiously into the side street. It was as I thought. I had been marked to ground and the café was well watched. Little Toliu and the natural were standing at the corner.

I walked down the passage again and into the café. The first person I caught sight of was Dumont, very red in the face, but extremely alert. He had adopted a strategic position close to the door, and was clasping a large mug of beer in his hand.

At that moment the telephone bell rang. My heart leapt.

"It is for me," I said hastily.

The *patronne*, however, had clambered down from her stool and, moving with stately majesty, completely

blocked the narrow passage. She picked up the receiver. I waited quivering at first with expectancy, and then with mortification.

"But is it possible?" she exclaimed. "Convey to the little Jacques my most cordial sentiments—what surprise—what joy."

I felt a touch on my shoulder. I started nervously. But it was only the serving man in a green apron.

"Monsieur desires to drink?" he inquired. "There is time, more than is necessary. She will be there for twenty minutes, the *patronne*. But how she loves the telephone."

"Bring me half a litre of white wine," I said mechanically.

I looked round again as I spoke, and found that Dumont, by the door, was covertly watching every movement that I made. I wondered, for a moment, what would happen if I openly pushed past him into the street. There would be an altercation. Dumont was still wearing the uniform of Aspaleia, and on those clothes his bluff would be infinitely more effective than mine. No one, certainly none of the loafers in the café, would move a finger to help me. On the contrary, they would only be too willing to assist in my arrest in the hope of a reward from the agency which he appeared to serve.

I slipped into a seat between two of the partitions. Dumont could no longer see me. That was one comfort. Now, moreover, I had company. There were four men in the pew I had chosen, who, to judge from their appearance, had seen better days. Three of them were in rags and the fourth was threadbare. They were sitting morosely side by side, so that I faced them, and each had in front of him the smallest glass of vermouth I have ever seen.

"It is a dirty trade," said one of them, as I took my place and began to pour out my wine.

"Of the dirtiest," said another.

"In such weather," said the third.

"And the remuneration is of the most miserable," declared the fourth.

The theme was then taken up again by Number One, developed by Number Two, transposed by Number Three, and reversed by Number Four.

It was some time before I realised what they were talking about, for my mind, as you may imagine, was turning upon other matters.

Number One began to embellish the subject.

"To walk about inside a bottle," he said, "with nothing to drink? It is an indignity."

I had an inspiration.

"Pardon me," I said. "But is it that I address myself to the four bottles of Doctor Perrot's Quinquina?"

The four men ceased talking abruptly, and four pairs of eyes were turned in my direction.

"Alas!" said one of them at last.

"Gentlemen," I continued, "it does indeed seem to me that to be shut up in a bottle on a day like this is a scandal."

"It is an offence," said the threadbare man.

"It is a crime," I rejoined, falling naturally into the fugal style.

"Allow me," I continued, "to offer you some temporary relief."

I waved to the waiter, and soon two litres of white wine and four glasses were placed in front of the four sandwich men.

"One moment, *garçon*," I said, for I had a sudden thought. "Bring to us also five double gentians."

The waiter bustled off to fulfil my order.

"Gentlemen," I added, "white wine should not be drunk on a stomach unprepared. May I, therefore, urge upon

you a preliminary consumption of gentian, a most healthy *liqueur*, from your own mountains."

"*Je m'en fiche, moi*," said Number Two, who had last shaved about ten days previously. "It is equal to me what I drink, so that I drink."

The gentians arrived.

"Health," said Number One.

"Happiness," said Number Two.

"Better acquaintance," said Number Three.

"Pleasure of meeting," said Number Four.

The four gentians simultaneously disappeared.

The score had here been marked *attaca subito*. The white wine *motif* was taken less abruptly, but the pace was pretty brisk, and in about ten minutes all four were merry and bright. I perceived that it was time to act. They had already agreed that I was a "brave type," and all that there is of the "most amiable." The threadbare man was particularly enthusiastic. I had, he assured me, a comprehension of things.

I suddenly came to the point.

"Monsieur," I said, "you have it in your power to do me a service."

"Indeed, Monsieur," he said. "I should be only too happy, provided it is nothing to do with money," and he laughed.

"Monsieur," I replied, "it is to do with love."

"That also arrives," he said gravely.

"It has arrived to me," I answered. "There is one whom I adore. I have the good fortune to please her."

"That does not surprise me," said the threadbare man with courtesy.

"Now, gentlemen," I went on, "I must ask you to be discreet. Do not appear to observe that there is a man sitting beside the door, in the uniform of Aspaleia."

The man at the end of the settle stealthily satisfied himself that there was indeed such a man.

"That man," I said, "is my rival. He knows that I have a *rendezvous*. He follows me in the street. He wishes to make for me a public scene and to hinder my felicity. I desire to leave this place without attracting his attention."

"There is the back door," said the threadbare man in a hoarse whisper which I hoped was not audible to every one in the café.

"There is, as you say, the back door," I admitted, "but the man has a comrade who watches for him outside."

The threadbare man considered the position a moment.

"Do you wish," he affably inquired, "that we should place for him a strong blow of the foot to the backside?"

"No," I said. "It shall be my own pleasure to perform for him that office on some other occasion. My present object is to subtract myself from his observation."

"*Bigre*," said the man, "what would you that we do?"

"Will you, sir," I said, still addressing the threadbare man, "allow me to take your place in the bottle?"

The man stared at me in amazement.

"*Mon Dieu*," he said at last, "but Monsieur is very much in love."

I assumed the look of a hero.

"To keep in peace my *rendezvous* with Celeste," I said, "I would do more than that."

"It is a serious thing that you ask," said the man. "I have contracted for the sum of one franc fifty centimes an hour to advertise the merits of Doctor Perrot's Quinquina. That is an honourable obligation. The remuneration is of the most miserable and the occupation of the most ignoble. But a contract has been concluded."

"And the contract shall be fulfilled," I hastened to add.

"I will myself advertise the virtues of Doctor Perrot's Quinquina and I will compensate you for the loss of that distinguished privilege."

I took from my pocketbook a twenty-franc note and laid it on the table.

"He is a brave type, is it not so?" the threadbare man asked of his companions.

"He is a brave type," they agreed.

"But how will you take my place?" he next demanded of me.

"Nothing, my friend, is easier," I replied.

I walked round the table, as I spoke, and slipped into the seat beside him. I was now well hidden by the partition and no one could see unless he actually put his head round the corner.

"Your coat and hat," I whispered.

The threadbare man looked at my excellent coat with obvious approval, and his companions smiled their acquiescence.

They were decent fellows, without envy, and I laid another note on the table.

"You will permit me, gentlemen," I said, "to leave with you all this small token of my gratitude and esteem."

"We will permit it," said Number One.

"It is agreed," said Number Two.

"I do not oppose myself to the arrangement," said Number Three.

"Now, gentlemen," I said, "if you are ready to start, we will leave by the back door."

Three of my four companions rose to their feet. The threadbare man pressed me warmly by the hand.

"Have no preoccupation," he said. "I will remain here till your rival departs. We mock ourselves of that sad individual, is it not so, my old?"

I left the pew, following in the footsteps of Number

One. Numbers Three and Four closed in behind me and screened me from Dumont. We gained the passage. I saw as I turned into it that Dumont had not moved from the door. The *patronne* was still at the telephone, but we did not stay for the end of her conversation. Each of us in turn muttered a "pardon" as we squeezed past her in Indian file to the back door, and so into the street.

Toliu and the servant, I noted at once, were still waiting. They looked at us hard, and for a moment—they were only ten yards away—I thought I was recognised. But they made no sign. One of my companions lifted one of the cardboard bottles and thrust it over my head.

"Quick, comrade," he said. "Put your arms through the slings. We will descend the Great Quai."

I found myself completely enclosed in a small turret of laths pasted over with paper. A tiny slit in front of the bottle made it possible for me to see where I was going. I was third in the row of four.

We started off slowly down the street, towards the Quai. The direction suited me well, for at the end of the Quai was the Hôtel Victoria, to which is attached the Salle de la Réformation. I had only about five hundred yards to go.

We lurched down the street, and to judge from the devious movement of the bottles, they must have appeared to be a highly successful advertisement of Doctor Perrot's Quinquina. It began to get very hot and stuffy inside my bottle, and I felt that the threadbare man, whom we had left comfortably installed in the café behind us, had chosen the better part. Presently I discovered two other little slits in the bottle, so that I could, by turning my head, see to right and left.

I looked aside to the pavement and then looked again to make sure. There was, unfortunately, not a doubt of it.

The red-faced Dumont was walking beside me, step for step.

I did some hasty thinking. Would he attempt to interfere with me, or rest content with keeping me in view? He would scarcely attack me in the busy street, and had no reason to do so unless I tried to communicate with some one. I had only another fifty yards to go, for we were now approaching the Rue Versonnex, part of one side of which is occupied by the wall of the Salle de la Réformation. There was a small crowd in the street. It had assembled to watch the arrival of the delegates, but evidently found the behaviour of our bottles more amusing, for I heard laughter to the right and left of me, and some one gave us an ironic cheer. I could see the man in front of me swaying like a ship in a heavy sea.

The sight of him gave me an idea. We were now nearly opposite the side door to the Salle de la Réformation. It opens directly into the Rue Versonnex and is reserved for members of the staff of the Secretariat. With a beating heart I awaited my opportunity. The moment came. It was now or not at all.

I bent forward with a sudden lurching movement, so that the top of my bottle, which projected some four feet above my head, came into violent contact with the back of my wayward companion in front. He was swaying to the left at the moment, and the blow catching him on the right, was enough completely to destroy his balance. Through my slit I saw the top of his bottle describe a huge semicircle and fall towards the pavement right in the path of Dumont.

In a flash I extracted myself from the slings which supported my own bottle, and struggled out of it. Dumont had fallen headlong over my companion, who was inextricably mixed up with his bottle, and tearing it to shreds in his efforts to get up again. The air was thick

with blasphemy. Dumont, rising from the ground as I emerged, was in a sitting posture. I promptly lifted my own bottle, and clapped it down upon him like an extinguisher. There was a roar of approval from the crowd, but I was taking no calls for this performance and, slipping sideways, I dived straight for the private entrance to the hall, where I was luckily met by one of the police who knew me by sight and touched his hat.

In another moment I stood, safe and sound, but feeling suddenly rather weak and forlorn, amid the surroundings of my ordinary official life.

CHAPTER XV

I LAUGH BUT AM NOT AMUSED

I leaned for a moment against the wall.

"Interval for silent reflection," I said to myself. What should I do first of the many things that had to be done at once? Had Radulara yet reached the Assembly Hall? Somebody was ringing a bell. Seconds out of the ring — that was how it sounded to me. But it was only an usher warning the delegates that the meeting was about to open.

I must find Radulara. The police would act more promptly with an Excellency to prod them. I made my way through chattering secretaries of the third and fourth degree, experts, delegates and journalists, and, so by the backstairs into the squalid vestibule behind the platform, whence I could get a view of the hall.

I pushed open the door leading immediately to the President's chair. Two stolid ushers put fingers to their lips as I did so, though why I cannot say, for the noise that greeted me as I thrust aside the curtain of coarse sacking which screens the entrance showed that the Assembly had not yet been called to order.

The hall was very full, and the two galleries overhanging it were crowded with journalists, members of the diplomatic corps, and the general public. On the floor of the house, delegates of every size and description were passing the time of day in the *lingua franca* of the League.

I stood a moment by the President's chair. The tables,

or rather desks, at which the delegates sit are arranged in the French alphabetical order of countries, and I raked them with an eagle eye, presently discovering Radulara, near the back of the hall, in animated conversation with some of his Balkan colleagues. The hall was extremely hot. Even Radulara had noticed it, for he was wearing only his fur coat and had discarded his travelling rug.

I walked down the steps of the platform and, threading my way between the desks, reached his side. The drill for approaching delegates is not simple. The correct procedure is to hover near at hand till your man is free. Then with an expression of glad surprise, the hand extended and the body inclined from the waist, you contrive to be standing there, obviously not to be avoided. But time was short. Without ceremony I walked up to Radulara and plucked him by the sleeve.

He whipped round, his little beady eyes flashing with surprise or alarm.

"Excellency," I said hastily. "I must speak to you at once."

He looked at me strangely, and I became aware that I was the object of a mild sensation. Several delegates were gazing at me with an astonishment which they were at no pains to disguise. It was not till then that I remembered my appearance, a fact which will sufficiently indicate my state of mind. I had left bits of my trousers at the Inn of the Golden Lion and I was wearing the coat of the threadbare man. The threadbare man had in his day been a bit of a boy, the coat being of a startling purple hue with a pink stripe.

But Radulara did not turn a hair, and I admired the coolness with which he immediately left a scandalised group of minor diplomatists to follow me down the aisle. Realising how I struck the beholder I wondered whether I should have the nerve to mount the platform for which

we were bound. I must have managed it somehow, for I eventually found myself once again behind the scenes, having successfully led my man to one of the small private rooms reserved for the conversations between Ministers, at which all the important work of the Assembly is really done.

Radulara scarcely gave me time to close the door.

"You are from Colonel Granby?" he began.

"I am indeed, Your Excellency."

"Have you any news of the King?"

"The King," I said in the best *précis* writing style, "is detained by the Flamboys. "We do not know where they have taken him, but we can lay hands on the men themselves. Colonel Granby also is their prisoner, together with Miss Winspeare, whom you saw yesterday. They are at the Villa Mont Allègre in Cologne."

As in my haste I rapped out this information, I realised how indigestible was the tale. How would he take it? To my surprise he took it at a gulp. Such things appeared to be part of the day's work of a Balkan Minister. He stretched his neck in the manner of a chicken swallowing a large worm and blinked his eyes rapidly several times.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Notify the police. Get them to go to the villa. They will act on a word from you."

"Not so fast, Mr. Baxter. I do not yet quite realise the position. Are you sure that the King is being detained by the Flamboys?"

"Quite sure. Believe me, Excellency, you cannot act fast enough. They will publish the news of the King's abduction to-night, and that will be their signal for the revolution."

"Revolution, Mr. Baxter? What are you talking about?"

"The Flamboys," I said, "have laid their plans for a

revolution in Bucharest. The King's abduction is the first step. The second is to obtain the necessary funds."

Radulara smiled.

"That is more than many a Prime Minister of Roumania has been able to do," he said.

"They have done it, Excellency, nevertheless."

"Impossible."

"They obtained an advance of three hundred and fifty thousand francs this afternoon on the security of the Ortania well."

The little eyes of Radulara glittered. They reminded me of boot buttons.

"But the plans are in my possession," he protested.

He clapped his hand to his pocket and drew out a mass of papers. Feverishly he shuffled them between his nervous fingers.

"I'm afraid it's no use, Excellency," I said. "The plans were stolen from you this afternoon by your own confidential agent."

"But I employ a man from Aspaleia."

"Name of Dumont," I said.

"I don't know his damn name," muttered Radulara.

"He is an agent of the Flamboys," I responded.

Radulara restored the papers to his pocket and passed a moist hand over his high forehead.

"How do you know all this?" he demanded.

"Excellency," I said, "every moment is of importance. We must act immediately. Send for the police and have these men arrested. I will then tell you the whole story."

He walked up and down the room, slouching like a bear in his great fur coat.

"You're sure they intend to publish the King's abduction?"

"They have perhaps already done so."

Radulara indicated the telephone on the small table between us.

"Ring up Stand 1900," he ordered.

I looked at him in hesitation.

"The police," he said. "It is the Chief Commissioner himself. He will not be surprised to hear from me. He knows already that he may be requested to act. I do not allow myself to be taken unprepared."

I caught up the receiver and gave the number.

"How many men do you want?" asked Radulara.

I looked at him with respect. That was the way to talk. He was deeper than I had thought. The police were ready to act. How many men did I want? Well, this was no time for moderation.

"A dozen at least," I said. "I will go with them at once to Cologny."

"Hullo!" I exclaimed, as a voice came down the wire.

Radulara lurched over towards me and took the receiver.

"The Prime Minister of Roumania," he said. "Yes . . . concerning the matter we discussed yesterday evening. I must request you to act at once. . . . A dozen men to go immediately to Cologny. . . . Tell the man in charge to pass by the Salle de la Réformation. . . . There is some one here who will take your men to the house. . . ."

Radulara broke off and turned to me. "What was the address?" he asked.

"Villa Mont Allègre," I answered.

"Villa Mont Allègre," repeated Radulara into the telephone.

He put down the receiver.

"They will be here in a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes," he said. "I shall have to sign a deposition giving the grounds for my application to have these men arrested. What do you suggest?"

"Excellency," I said, "they have abducted a king, stolen a diplomatic bag, put a couple of bullets into my petrol tank and tried to do the same for me, and they are forcibly detaining an agent of the British Government—not to mention Miss Winspeare. There certainly seems enough to go upon."

Radulara shook his head. He even smiled, and it was the smile of a happy lawyer.

"It's fortunate for us, young man," he said, "that I happen to have studied the procedure. I shall mention none of these things. I have found the formula, and these miscreants will be arrested on the ground that they have been guilty of offences calculated to compromise, if not seriously to endanger, the neutrality of Switzerland."

He paused and looked at me quizzically. Radulara was improving out of all knowledge. I began to understand his reputation. He was a man of action and he had a sense of humour. He seemed to be wasted on the Balkans.

"Mr. Baxter," he said, "you have a quarter of an hour. Tell me quickly what is essential."

I rapidly outlined to him the events of the morning, told him of the conference with Dubosc and the unmasking of Granby. In less than five minutes I had told him the facts—except the most important of them all.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Baxter. A masterly summary," he observed.

"Alas, Excellency," I replied, "I am a *précis* writer. But your compliment is undeserved. I have omitted the most important point."

Radulara looked at me keenly, his little eyes bright with anticipation.

"The revolution in Roumania," I continued, "is only a preliminary step. As soon as Toliu is in power and the Flamboys have netted the spoils—and it seems they expect to be oil kings for life—the real object of these

manœuvres will be shown. Within easy reach of the frontier are two corps of Soviet troops."

Radulara leaned across the back of the chair beside him. "Do you mean that they intend to let in the Russians?"

"That is the secret aim of the revolution. Moussorsky is acting for Moscow. The others will play into his hands as soon as they can safely do so, but there must, of course, be no word of this till the revolution is complete. As I understand it, sir, they are relying on the peasants to follow them and fear to lose this support if the Russians are known to be moving."

"Enough," said Radulara.

I looked at him in amazement. He was a man transformed, at the same time impressive and ludicrous. More than ever like a bear he padded with a curious swinging gait from one end of the little room to the other, his eyes flashing, his voice rising to a thin scream.

"You have delivered them into my hands," he chanted. "Let them have fifty wells and abduct a dynasty of kings. It will avail them not at all."

He swept up and down, gesticulating with his delicate hands. I was all his audience, but he might have been talking to a multitude or to no one at all.

"Why am I the Prime Minister of Roumania?" he asked of the world. "Do you think I am there by bribery or a mere shuffling of the cards? I am there because I know my people . . . Ciuntu and his peasants, Olesco and his traders, Raziano and his aristocrats. I know them all. They would cut each other's throats for a shilling. But there is one thing, only one thing, that will unite them. There is not one man in a hundred in Roumania who does not live in fear and hatred of Soviet Russia. I have only to say that the men who have taken the King and are plotting my overthrow are in league with Moscow and this precious revolution is finished before it has begun.

Ciuntu is an able man. The peasants believe in him. He has it in his power to do more harm than any other man in Roumania. But I will draw his teeth for him. Tomorrow morning every newspaper in the world shall have word of his treachery, and then we will see how many of his peasants will support him. My speech will be his death warrant. He will be torn to pieces."

He moved to the door as he spoke, but I stepped in front of him.

"Your speech, Excellency?" I faltered.

Radulara stopped and looked at me.

"My speech," he repeated. "I must see the Secretary-General at once. I intend to denounce the conspiracy from the platform of the Assembly. I shall tell of the King's abduction and the mobilisation of Russian troops and of the presence of a Moscow agent among the conspirators."

I put my hand on his arm.

"Is this necessary?" I said. "Your Excellency is running a very serious risk. A quiet communication to the press would be just as effective."

"It would be received as a *canard*," he said. "A speech from the platform of the Assembly cannot, however, be ignored."

"Please think a moment," I urged. "The Flamboys know that such a warning from such a place would ruin their plans. They are desperate men. No adequate precautions have yet been taken to secure your Excellency's personal safety. Moussorsky himself said that any word from you pointing at Soviet Russia would be your last."

I spoke slowly, carefully watching the effect of my announcement.

Radulara paused and looked at me. Then his head went back, and in that moment despite his fantastical appearance and weak gestures, despite his thin metallic voice, he had an air of dignity, as strange as it was inevitable.

"Death," he said softly. "That is always possible. Besides," he added with his customary look of shrewdness, "how can they possibly interfere? You left them less than an hour ago at Cologne. They cannot yet have had time to arrange for my assassination in this hall. I am going to speak now — at once."

He pushed past me as he finished and made for the door. There, however, he turned.

"Go with the police," he said. "I need not impress on you the urgency of your mission. His Majesty the King —"

He broke off and to my surprise the thin declamatory voice dropped almost to a human level.

"The boy must be saved," he added abruptly.

I was amazed to see the thin mouth quiver as he spoke.

There came a knock at the door. We both started and turned towards it. The man who entered was Marriott, head of the Establishment Office of the Secretariat.

"I beg your pardon, Excellency," he announced. "But there is a man here from the Chief Commissioner of Police."

The man entered. He was in the full-dress uniform of the Geneva Constabulary, white gloves and epaulettes, a cocked hat under his arm, complete with sword. He laid his hat on the table and handed Radulara a formidable document hung about with seals and exquisitely engraved.

"The deposition, Excellency," he said. "You have only to state the grounds of the arrest and sign the document in the space provided."

Radulara took the paper and began hurriedly to write.

"Your men are outside?" he asked.

"They will be here in a quarter of an hour, Excellency. I understand that there is a gentleman here who will conduct us to the house."

Radulara handing back the deposition indicated me with a wave of the hand.

"Mr. Baxter here will accompany you," he said. "I would beg you not to lose any time. This is a matter of life and death."

The man bowed in the manner of one who refuses to be hustled, removed his impressive hat from the table and left the room.

Radulara turned to Marriott, who had been watching these proceedings with the detachment of a well-trained official.

"Have they started yet in there?" he asked, pointing vaguely in the direction of the hall.

"They began some little time ago," Marriott replied. "The delegate for Haiti has just left the platform."

Radulara lurched suddenly towards the door.

"Come to me as soon as you have anything to report," he darted at me over his shoulder.

I remained for a moment with Marriott, explaining to him briefly the position, and warning him about the men in the uniform of Aspaleia. He was sceptical at first, and inclined to be amused rather than impressed, but when I had done with him he left the room hurriedly.

I then made my way to the platform, having told Marriott that when the police arrived I should be waiting for them behind the President's chair.

As I pushed aside the curtains, the hush that greeted me was in curious contrast with the babel that I had left behind me only a short time before. I covered on tiptoe the few yards separating me from the President. The rostrum for the orators is in front of him, and immediately below. It is a narrow platform with a high desk on which stands a ballot box and a microphone.

I heard at once, with a thrill of excitement, the thin

metallic voice of Radulara. He was already speaking, and had the attention of the house.

"... and so, Monsieur le Président, it may become necessary for Roumania, in her hour of need, to come before her sister nations in this great League and to invoke most solemnly, by the terms of the Covenant which binds us all, the help and support which is due to her and which she knows will be forthcoming."

For a moment he paused and then with dramatic suddenness came to the point.

"The day before yesterday," he continued, "His Majesty King Peter, of Roumania, was abducted from the train in which he was travelling to Bucharest. This outrage was successfully organised and committed within a short distance from where we are now met together—not far from the Swiss frontier station of Vallorbe. The King has disappeared, and no one knows what has become of him."

There was a rustling among the assembled delegates, and looking up to the press galleries on either side, I saw the reporters, recovering from the shock of their surprise, scribbling furiously at their telegrams.

"The men who have stolen him," continued Radulara, "intend to publish the abduction this evening, and its publication will be the signal of revolution in Roumania. I will not weary this Assembly with a history of the unhappy dissensions which distract my beloved country. These are domestic matters, with which it concerns Roumania and Roumania alone to deal. But in this instance I cannot remain silent, for these are events which will shortly concern you all and prove an acid test of your faith in this League of Nations which we have created. The men who have obtained possession of our King belong to a small and violent revolutionary party in my country, which aims at the overthrow of my Government. But gentlemen, there is worse behind. The overthrow of my

government would in my opinion be a misfortune for the peace of Europe, but it could hardly be a pretext for your intervention. I have to tell you, however, that this is merely a preliminary step and that events are being prepared, and will shortly be carried forward, which will be a menace to us all and will constitute a deliberate breach of the peace of the world. When I tell you who and what are behind these men, driving them on — when I tell you that the whole fabric of Europe, undermined by the Great War, may, as a result of their action, come crashing to the ground — then you will surely agree that this miserable domestic tragedy, as it appears on the face of it, is something of immeasurably greater import. Gentlemen, I have absolute proof — it came into my hands only a few moments ago, that the real origin and source of this conspiracy is not to be sought among my political rivals in Bucharest. This revolution is being encouraged and supported — ”

Good God, what was that? There was a flash of light from the gallery just above the platform. The thin voice became a choking sigh. The speaker collapsed, where he stood, as I sprang forward and pandemonium broke loose in the hall.

He had fallen across the ballot box, and from above his collar protruded the black handle of a knife which gleamed in the light from the upper windows.

I stood, as they say, rooted to the spot — a good phrase and a credit to the man who first invented it. For the moment I was scarcely aware of the cries and footsteps and the screams of the women in the diplomatic gallery. I was again in the quiet study in Freshwater where I had seen that dreadful sight before. Was it less than a week ago? Angus McGuffie had sat facing me at his desk with just such another knife thrust home in just such a place.

A throng of interpreters and secretaries were crowding about Radulara, and an usher suddenly thrust me aside, calling for a doctor as he ran towards the door behind the platform.

Then I came to my senses.

I dashed after the usher through the door, and thence up to the staircase which led to the press gallery. On the stairs I ran into Marriott.

"Quick," I shouted, pulling him by the arm. "The knife was thrown from the press gallery."

At that moment the door of the gallery opened and a crowd of journalists, thrust forth by the pressure behind, came at us like a breaker. Telegraph forms were thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. Borne on the crest of the wave, so to speak, came another usher and with him a man in the uniform of Aspaleia.

"Close the doors," shouted Marriott.

We did our best, but we were as pebbles on the beach. The tide rolled us helplessly back. I became aware that the man from Aspaleia was at my right elbow. We stared at each other a moment.

"So," said Dumont.

"Marriott!" I shouted.

Then I felt a sickening sensation. The floor shifted and faces whirled. Dumont had at last had his revenge. He had struck me with the fist of a master on the point of the jaw.

I found myself, on coming to, lying on the floor in the room behind the President's chair. Marriott's arm was across my shoulder.

"That's better," he was saying.

I collected my scattered wits. There was a terrible noise going on, trampling feet and a roar of many voices.

"How long have I been like this?" I asked.

"Five minutes, perhaps," said Marriott.

"Marriott," I said, clutching his arm. "Where is that man from Aspaleia? It was he that knocked me out."

"I saw him do it," said Marriott. "He asked me to apologise. Mistook you for a journalist and thought to stay the rush by drastic measures. I lost sight of him when I was attending to you. I suppose he lost his nerve and made off when he saw what he had done."

"Lost his nerve," I said. "That was the murderer. Throwing that knife at Radulara was the end of a perfect day."

I began to giggle weakly, and a queer look came into Marriott's eyes.

"Are you sure you are quite all right?" he anxiously enquired.

I got to my feet, staggered a moment, then pulled myself together.

"Quite all right," I said. "But tell me. Have those police started yet for Mont Allègre?"

"They called for you just after you were knocked out, and decided not to wait. They should be there by now."

I started for the door to the staircase, but Marriott held me by the arm.

"Where are you going?" he asked. "You're not really fit —"

"I'm going after the police," I said.

"They have drawn a cordon round the building. Every one that passes is required to give an account of himself."

"The stable door is locked, bolted and barred," I said bitterly. "Where is Radulara?"

Marriott pointed to the door that led to the platform.

"They have not moved him yet. We have sent for an ambulance."

"Then he is still alive?"

Marriott shook his head.

"Not much hope," he answered.

I turned abruptly. Marriott called after me, but I did not even hear what he said.

"In at the death," I muttered. I would see those scoundrels rounded up, and perhaps Dumont would himself return to the villa. It would then be my turn to say "So."

There is a cab rank near the Salle de la Réformation, I showed my card to the police and staggered towards it, still feeling most mortally sick and doing some useful mental exercises on the way.

"Nothing wrong with you, old man," I said to myself. "Just a little knock on the jaw — what the lawyers would call a refresher.

"Quick," I called to the driver. "Villa Mont Allègre, Cologny. Double fare if we get there in ten minutes."

The man stared at me oddly, and I suddenly realised that he was looking at a threadbare man. I thrust a note into his hand.

"*Bien, Monsieur, bien,*" he said at once and started his engine. The back of the taxi was open and the cool stream of air revived me. With a double fare in prospect the driver was a man inspired. We covered in a couple of minutes the ground which I had traversed so painfully as a bottle only an hour before. Soon we were climbing the steep winding hill that rose to the Inn of the Golden Lion. Then we turned to the left.

Suddenly the driver clapped on his brakes, and the car slowed almost to a standstill beside the ditch. Two cars had come round the corner, and were passing us going in the opposite direction. The first was a large limousine; the second a two-seater which seemed vaguely familiar. Then we started forward again to the villa gates, where we slewed to the left and ran up the short drive. The taxi drew up with a jerk. I sprang out and looked towards the front door. It was ajar and there was nowhere any sign of the police — only their cars in the road. Had they

raided the villa and taken their men? But the cars were empty.

It was odd.

Then abruptly, I became aware of a curious and unexpected sound. Some one in the house was laughing, and as I stood there, rooted to the spot (a good phrase) somebody else had seen the joke, for there came more laughter in a different key.

I pushed open the door. In the far corner of the big living room were four policemen. Two were writhing on the floor, as in the agony of death. Two others were mutually supporting one another drunkenly beside the table. And all four of them were laughing—laughing helplessly, but weak as from exhaustion. The tears were streaming down their cheeks. Then, as I stared at them in amazement, I became aware that from other parts of the house similar sounds were proceeding, and at the same instant there stole upon me a sickly scent. I sniffed it suspiciously and gave an involuntary gasp, then another. The sight of the writhing policemen on the floor seemed to me all at once the funniest thing I had ever seen. My breath began to come from me in small sighs and chuckles. Then, as another wave of the scent invaded me, I threw back my head. My sides were shaking, and with a great burst of laughter I joined the idiot revellers on the floor.

CHAPTER XVI

I ATTAIN MY HEART'S DESIRE

I have never laughed so much in my life and I hope I never shall again. My body shook in paroxysm after paroxysm of seeming mirth, and I listened in amazement to the sounds that issued from my mouth. This was the famous cylinder 351 — Wyndham's sovereign cure for riot and revolution, and undoubtedly it seemed to be working. I was thankful to note, however, that the gas, though it had so confounding an effect upon the body, left the brain clear, and I struggled with great difficulty to my feet in an endeavor to reach the open door behind me. Sobbing with laughter, but in a towering rage, I stumbled out into the garden. There I drew breath after breath of clean air, till the gas was ousted from my lungs, and the paroxysms began to subside.

Cautiously I returned to the door. Coming towards me, his large hands pressed to his shaking sides, was an enormous policeman, who should at that moment have been arresting the Flamboys. I stood back and one by one the men began to stagger from the house, holding to each other by the shoulders. Then, from somewhere inside came the sharp sound of a window being thrust open, and I became aware of further convulsions within. But the worst was over, and above the dying rumbles of the Gargantuan mirth other sounds now began to be heard — the trampling of feet, the crying of oaths and orders, still, however, liable to end untimely in an unseemly chuckle.

The largest policeman of the lot approached me and

laid a huge but weak hand upon my shoulder. His face wore the "you'd better come quietly" expression common to all policemen in the discharge of their duty.

"No," I said. "You've got it wrong this time."

The man laughed. Was it the gas or was he deriding my claims to respectability? I was still wearing the coat of the threadbare man.

At that moment another policeman appeared in the doorway. He was swaying dangerously, and, even as I watched, he crashed heavily to the ground. It was then that I caught sight of Granby. He came slowly down the steps from the house and leaning upon his shoulder, supported by his arm, was Ann. The tears were streaming down the faces of both of them. I hurried forward.

"B — Baxter," he gasped. "Take her — c-carry on. I can do no more."

He subsided weakly upon the grass, and I found myself supporting Ann, whose slim sides were still shaken as she rested in my arms. I shall never forget that moment — absurd as it was, even odious, but a joy to remember.

"What has become of Wyndham?" I asked, as soon as Granby began to breathe more easily.

"G-gone," he chuckled. "The j-joke is on us, Baxter. They've vanished into thin air. Left not a wrack behind. You should have seen them — complete with gas masks — policemen everywhere — writhing — on the stairs — on the landing — sport that wrinkled care derides — and laughter holding both his sides — I mustn't think of it. I shall begin again in earnest if I do."

Ann was ceasing to be afflicted. She even tried to withdraw from my arms as Granby rose from the grass. He drew a long breath, anxiously, as though he feared to be overcome in the midst of it. Meanwhile, the sound of heavy footsteps in the house indicated that the situation was becoming normal.

"Thank God, you are safe," I murmured to Ann, whom I still felt it necessary to support.

"We were to have been taken off by the Flamboys," said Granby, "at least that was Wyndham's idea. They were arguing about it when the telephone bell rang. I could not hear what was said, but little Toliu, who answered, went sea-green. Then they pushed me into the conservatory."

"Where was Ann?" I inquired.

"Ask her," said Granby.

"Where were you, Ann?" I continued.

"They put me into a chair in the hall," she said. "Then they ran with luggage ready-packed to two motor cars. One of them looked like yours, John."

"Confound it," I interposed, "have they pinched my car? It must have been them I met on the road just now. I thought the two-seater looked familiar."

Ann continued her tale.

"One of the servants then came rushing in and shouted that the police were arriving. Thereupon Francis just strolled over to a cupboard —"

"Francis?" I echoed.

"I call him Francis," said Ann. "He just walked to a cupboard. You know his way —"

"We know his way," said Granby.

"He threw them each a gas mask and then produced a box full of little glass balls. They put on the masks and Francis began to throw the balls all over the place, some on the drive, some on the porch and others in the house. After that I don't remember very well what happened, for I began to laugh."

"Poor darling," I murmured.

"The next minute the room was full of laughing bobbies. And that was the end of it — until you appeared."

During this recital Granby had been walking backwards

and forwards on the little lawn. He had now completely recovered from the effects of the gas. He paused beside us abruptly as Ann finished her tale.

"Now, Baxter," he said, "what have *you* been doing? Who are all these policemen, and what was it that gave little Toliu such a turn at the telephone?"

"It was something drastic," I replied.

Ann released herself from a grip which she apparently considered to be no longer necessary.

"Was it anything to do with Peter?" she asked quickly.

"Not exactly," I said. "I warned Radulara about the Soviets. He walked straight into the Assembly and began to make a speech about the whole thing. He did not say very much."

Granby gripped me by the arm.

"Did they get him, is that what you mean?"

I nodded.

"Dumont," I said. "He threw a knife from the press gallery."

Ann turned a little pale and took a step towards Granby.

"What will they do with Peter?" she asked.

"I cannot answer that question, Miss Winspeare, till I know exactly what has happened.

"Did Radulara get in any reference to the Soviets?" he continued, turning to me.

"He was not allowed to get as far as that."

"Then for the moment the secret is safe, and the revolution can go on," said Granby.

"Until we publish what we know," I pointed out.

At that moment our conversation was interrupted. A commissioner of police, covered with blue and white braid, trying to look as impressive as his red face and watery eyes permitted, was standing beside us. He saluted, enquired who we were, and listened stolidly to the explanations of Granby. Granby told him enough to provoke

immediate action but no more. We moved towards the house, now sufficiently aired, and soon, through the open door, we heard him inside giving his instructions on the telephone. The bandits must at all costs be intercepted; the roads must be watched; steps, the most energetic, must be taken.

Granby, looking grimly at the commissioner, shook his head.

"Not a hope," he said. "They've left the canton by now, and the canton next door will have to be informed. By the time the canton next door is sufficiently wide-awake our lads will have crossed into the next. And so forth."

"We've got them properly on the mat in any case," I said. "They stopped Radulara, but they can't stop me or you. We've only to publish the fact that the Flamboys are in league with the Soviets, and it's all up with their revolution."

"Is it that I address myself to Monsieur le Colonel Granby?" said a voice.

Granby whipped round. A man was standing beside us dressed in a dirty blue overall and a peaked cap. He held in his hand a twist of paper.

Granby nodded.

"It was said that this message would be worth to me on delivery the sum of five francs," said the man.

"Was it, indeed?" said Granby.

He slipped a hand into his trouser pocket and produced a large coin.

"I would have been here before," said the man, "but Sarah does not like hills."

With a jerk of his thumb he indicated an immense lorry standing in the lane beyond the garden hedge.

Granby took the paper and unfolded it.

"Who gave you this message?" he asked.

"I received it from a gentleman who stepped from his car

at the bottom of the lull near the Port Noir," said the man.

Granby read the paper and turned to us.

"Listen to this," he said in a low tone.

He drew us towards him and we moved away to the grass beneath the apple trees.

The note was to the following effect:

A word of advice, my dear Colonel. You may wonder why we have just left you so tactfully behind us. The answer is simple. First, there was no time to arrange for your transport. Secondly, you and you alone may be able to render us a real service by doing your utmost to prevent any public reference being made to the fact that the Flamboys are in communication with Soviet Russia. Any such reference would, as you know, undoubtedly endanger the success of our plans, and in that event I must tell you frankly that I should no longer be able to protect the King of Roumania.

Yours in haste,
FRANCIS WYNDHAM.

P. S. I am sure Miss Winspeare will agree with me.

"In plain English," said Granby, as he folded the paper and put it in his pocket, "if we breathe a word of Russia they will kill the King. Bit of a facer, isn't it?"

Ann was staring at Granby with a look of panic in her eyes.

"Do you think that they really mean what they say?" she asked.

Granby nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I'm afraid they do."

"Impossible," I protested. "If we publish what we know, it's all up with their revolution. Why, then, should they kill the King? He will be their only card. With the King still in their hands they will at least have a hostage."

"I don't agree," said Granby. "You know the original plan. You heard it this morning. Brutus is an honourable

man — all that sort of thing. Revolution in spats. Peace, retrenchment and reform. Big foreign loan on adequate security — little Toliu in a frock coat balancing his budget and making the world safe for democracy. Meanwhile the Flamboys feather their little nests and prepare for dirty work at the postern gate. Enter Soviets. Exit Roumania.”

“But we blow all that sky high with a few well-chosen words,” I objected.

“I haven’t finished yet,” said Granby. “So long as things go well with the revolution, there is no necessity to kill the King. They may even use him — show him to the people — carry on for a bit under royalist colours. Suppose however, we finish Radulara’s speech for him. It’s spats off then with a vengeance. No more use for frock coats and respectability. Not a financier in Europe would touch the Flamboys with a long spoon. Their only remaining chance will be to paralyse all the forces of order and let in the Red troops immediately. And the first thing they will do is to kill the King to prevent any possible rally. No, Baxter, it isn’t bluff. We can’t say or do anything to endanger the revolution until the King is safely in our hands.”

I could not but admire the trained manner in which he summed up the situation.

We stood watching him in silence as he walked moodily up and down the grass. What next? There was every call to be up and doing. The face of Ann was enough. But I beat my brains in vain.

The commissioner came from the house. His loud, cheerful voice broke in upon us unreasonably.

“Have no fear,” he was saying to Granby. “Every possible step is being taken to apprehend the miscreants. I have telephoned to the police of the city. The police of the city have notified the police of the canton. The police

of the canton will assuredly awaken the Federal authorities, and the Federal authorities will arrange a coöperation, for all useful ends, between all the services concerned."

"And suppose they cross the frontier into France or Italy?" I interposed.

"In that case, Monsieur, the responsibility will be with the police of the countries concerned."

"Thank you," said Granby in the voice of a man overcome with gratitude.

The man saluted and moved away.

"Well," said Granby, "there is only one thing to do. We must search the villa from cellar to garret. They may have left some sort of a clue to the whereabouts of the King. But I doubt it."

He began to move towards the house as he spoke. The orchard was now full of shadows. The Jura were going dark and the sky below them held the ruins of the sunset. Most of the light was now reflected from a single cloud which was stealing like a ship with its cargo of light through the gap at Bellegarde. I shivered slightly. The movement made me aware of Ann. She had been standing by my side, but now took a step forward.

"Colonel Granby," she said.

Granby stopped.

"I think we have a clue," she went on.

Granby was back on the little lawn in a few quick strides. Ann had thrust her hand into the top of her frock and she now drew forth a small piece of paper. She unfolded and examined it. She then handed it to Granby with a look of disappointment.

"I can make nothing of it," she said.

Granby looked at the paper and passed it to me. It was a bare sheet with the following device: B. de P. Morges A.47926.

I looked from Granby to Ann and back again.

"It's not as clear as it might be," I said at last. "What does it mean, and how did you come by it?"

"It's a parting message from Francis," said Ann. "I was already under the influence of the gas. I had fallen back into a chair. You know what it was like."

"I do," said Granby feelingly. "It happened to me in the conservatory and I hadn't a chair. There was, however, a fine cactus."

"Francis thrust that paper into my frock, as he went off. He said nothing, and I don't know whether he was feeling particularly sympathetic because he was wearing a gas mask. But he pressed my hand and I think he was leaving me more in sorrow than in anger."

"B. de P.?" I said. "Baden de Powell — British de Petrol."

"Try Bureau de Poste," suggested Granby.

"Why, of course," said Ann, flushing with excitement.

"Bureau de Poste, A.47926, Morges. I see now what he means. I am to write him a letter to that number and he will call for it."

"Bravo, Miss Watson," replied Granby.

"But why should he leave you his address?" I demanded indignantly.

"Not a very bright remark, Baxter," said Granby. "Miss Winspeare has not allowed Francis to waste his time. I can assure you of that. He lives in hope and is naturally reluctant to lose so charming an opportunity for the exercise of his peculiar gifts."

He turned to Ann.

"We must see how we can best turn this to account. It shouldn't be beyond us now to pick up the trail. Think it over yourself. Obviously we must write to Wyndham and we will discuss the details later. But first I must see what the authorities are doing in Geneva. I shall go back at once with the commissioner, and I will meet you for

dinner in an hour's time at the Café du Port Franc."

"One moment," I said. "Hadn't we better return with you?"

Granby looked quizzically from me to Ann and back again.

"No," he said. "I will send a taxi for you from the town. It will be more — comfortable."

He turned and walked rapidly towards the gate. During the last few minutes the commissioner had been collecting his forces, leaving only two of his men in charge of the villa. Granby reached the road and jumped into a car already full of officers, and a moment later a cloud of dust rising above the hedge, marked his progress along the road to Geneva.

I moved back to Ann. The garden was now very quiet. My mind was full of the clue which had been so oddly placed in our hands. How could we use it without exposing Ann to a greater risk than I was prepared to admit? My anger rose at the man's complacency. Did he think that Ann was the victim of his airs and graces — Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad — Was that the idea?

"Damn the fellow," I muttered.

"Is that how you feel about it, John?" said Ann.

"Naturally. Does he imagine that you're going to write to him by the first post?" I asked.

"Perhaps he does. And that is just what I *am* going to do."

"What is the use of it?" I protested.

"It is our only chance. I may persuade him to meet me. The rest I shall leave to Colonel Granby. Once he picks up the trail, I'm pretty sure he will not lose it again."

She had moved towards the edge of the orchard, which sloped gently down to join the vines among which I had blundered that afternoon. She stood with her back to me and the last light was shining through her hair.

"The man," I said, "must be mad, unless — unless —"

"Well, John?"

"Unless you have given him reason to think that he can play fast and loose."

"Fast and loose is good," said Ann.

I stood beside her, aloof and a little sullen. Only a few hours before Ann had walked in this orchard with Wyndham. They had come back together, and before my eyes he had kissed her hand in that affected way of his.

"Ann," I said, "why did he leave you that message?"

I could not see her face. It was now too dark, but her voice, most matter-of-fact, came to me out of the twilight.

"The man must be mad," I continued.

"Very possibly," said Ann. "He asked me to marry him this afternoon."

"Did he, by George?" I answered. "And what did you say to that?"

"I said I would consider the matter," she replied evenly.

I stepped forward, so that we stood closely facing each other.

"The matter requires no consideration," I said, putting my hands on her shoulders, "no consideration whatever Ann. You are going to marry me."

Her face was in shadow.

"Am I, John?" she asked, and then she added quickly, "Who is the madman now?"

My hands went towards her through the gloom. We stood a moment, trembling. Her head was dark against the pale gleaming of the lake behind us. This was the moment. Without a word I bent and kissed her lips, and she did not deny me. So we clung together, while the day died at our feet. The fantastic adventures in which we were entangled faded into the shadows about us. This was reality. I had attained my heart's desire.

During the half-hour which followed, we talked in

sudden rushes, with spells and drifts of silence coming between. I will say nothing of that time in the garden. Nothing was said that had any bearing on the task before us. We lived in the moment. One thing only I should, perhaps, record. We were going over together the events of the previous day, and had come to the point, ignominious for me, when I had left Ann in the house of Mademoiselle Vallier at Lausanne.

"What did they do to you?" I asked. "Why did you send me away?"

"It was Peter," she said in a low voice. "They had him there in the room with me. They would have killed him if I hadn't told you to go away."

Her voice trembled and once more she was in my arms.

After that I remember nothing till a taxi swept suddenly up to the gate, and the driver, descending without mercy, hurried us back to Geneva.

CHAPTER XVII

I AM UNAVOIDABLY ABSENT

I will not describe in any detail our dinner party at the Café du Port Franc. Granby had discovered our secret before the soup was off the table. We drank toasts and did our best, but at the back of our minds was the problem that waited to be discussed. I knew I should have to fight them both, and I knew also that I was bound to be defeated.

Granby waited until after dinner before he came to the point. Ann was to write to Wyndham at once with a view to meeting him where and when he pleased. I fought the scheme tooth and nail. I lost my temper and used harsh words, but they availed me nothing. They were two to one, and one of them was Ann, and I had to give way. I felt better when it was over and yielded at last as gracefully as I could. If you have to give in, it is well to make the best of it — a sound copy-book maxim. Here endeth the first lesson, and there will be no collection.

There and then we sent for pen and ink, and Ann indited the following letter:

MY DEAR MR. WYNDHAM,

Thank you for leaving your address. So you remember the garden and our too brief talk? Perhaps we shall meet again, soon I hope.

Yours very sincerely,
ANN WINSPEARE.

Granby was in favour of heavier bait, but Ann would have none of it. She claimed to know Francis and said

we needn't worry. The letter would bring him if he was intending to be brought. And why else should he have enabled her to communicate?

The next two days I would pass over in silence if I could. I was engaged to Ann, it was true, but, with Ann proposing to act as decoy to the principal Flamboy, the bells on Bredon were not ringing as loud and clear as they might have been. There was work, moreover, to be done at the office. Revolutions might break out in the Balkans, statesmen be struck down at the Assembly, ruffians stalk through Geneva drugging the police, concluding loans with doubtful bankers, abducting women and kings, but the Assembly of the League of Nations had still to go on, and its proceedings to be reported every day in the *Journal*, for which I was partly responsible. My chief not being in my confidence, for, indeed, secrecy was the essence of our plan, was somewhat peeved at my neglect of the office.

Radulara, meanwhile, was lying very near death. The knife that had pierced his throat had missed by a fraction of an inch the jugular vein, and he had been rushed to the hospital by the sensible Marriott within a quarter of an hour of the attack. To that, and that circumstance alone, he owed his life. But I am told he will never speak above a whisper again. Out of evil comes good.

Granby and I were constantly in touch, and naturally we did our best to ascertain what was happening in Roumania. The whole country appeared to be "frequent in combustion." Peasants were marching hither and thither. There were assemblies at Alba Julia at which all kinds of revolutionary demands were put forward. Both parties, for opposite motives, made the most of the King's abduction, and it was impossible in those early days to know which way the cat would jump. So far as we could ascertain, however, the Government held firm, placarding the country with bulletins about the attempt on Radulara and the

fight for life he was making. The Regent of Roumania, Prince Draghiresco, stood bravely to his post and called on all loyal subjects to remain firm. Not a word was breathed in any of the messages from Bucharest referring to the Soviets or to the two Red corps, hovering mysteriously in the woods two days' march from the frontier. Of the white, bearded faces, the gleaming bayonets, the rumble of their transport, the foul, hooded creatures dragging their uncouth scientific weapons — nothing was heard. Should we say the word? Time and again I felt that we must, but always we were brought up short. We could do nothing while the King stood in peril of his life. If the facts were published the King would die; the Red armies would move forward; the dyke would be breached and the foul torrent would tumble through.

Granby was in constant touch with the Secretary-General of the League, the Foreign Ministers of Great Britain, France and Germany, and the Roumanian Delegation, not to mention the police, and he had difficulties with them all. The Foreign Ministers could only be persuaded with the greatest difficulty to refrain from publishing the facts about Soviet Russia in order to scotch the revolution. They would not hold their hands indefinitely. The peace and order of Europe, the existence of the League, were at stake. Granby had continuously to plead for time. Every hour that passed made his position more difficult, and he lived in continual fear of an ultimatum.

As for the police, Granby's language on that subject was lurid. Cantonal, Federal, departmental, municipal, but not, I am afraid, mental, authorities had been invoked, but all in vain. Switzerland, he was assured, was being scoured for the King, but never a sight did they get of him, not so much as a hair of his head. This was all the more remarkable in view of the fact that they were

assisted by every newspaper in the country, from the *Basler Nachrichten* to the *Tribune de Genève*. Those in Switzerland corresponding to *Paterfamilias*, *Pro Bono Publico* and *Mother of Sixteen*, wrote amazing letters to the editor, propounding all kinds of ingenious solutions. The Swiss love of democracy was never better exemplified than by the wholehearted manner in which the nation to a man interested itself in the whereabouts of the King of Roumania. During the two days that followed the disappearance of the Flamboys, Granby, who spent most of his time talking down the telephone, received reports that the King had been seen in Appenzell, Glarus, Zug, Aargau, Thurgau and Schwyz. His hair changed from red to black, from black to brown, and one hopeful peasant even produced an albino. Certainly there was no lack of zeal. The Federal Government's reward of fifty thousand francs may, of course, have had something to do with all this pothor, but I prefer to think that what really moved the citizens of Switzerland was the unprovoked attack which had been made upon her neutrality.

One triumph the police did score. They caught and locked up the signalman who had stopped the train near Vallorbe for the few minutes which had enabled Wyndham to hand King Peter through the window to his confederates waiting beside the track. The man, it appeared, was a Communist, a member of a small band organised by Moussorsky in Switzerland, and hitherto regarded by the police, not unjustifiably, with indifference. The signalman was not much good to them anyhow, for he could tell them nothing.

The letter from Ann to Wyndham was posted on Tuesday evening. His reply reached her at the Pension de la Reine on Thursday morning. My first feeling was amazement at his audacity. He announced that he was coming to Geneva and that he would meet her anywhere she chose

to appoint. She instantly replied asking him to come to a small pension in the Boulevard des Tranchées whither she had betaken herself from the Pension de la Reine, when we had thought it better that she and Granby should not be advertised as staying at the same place.

Granby was less impressed than I was by the fact that Wyndham was putting his head into the lion's mouth.

"He knows that we can't touch him so long as he holds the King," he pointed out.

"He can't be sure," I insisted.

"He doesn't need to be sure," said Granby. "The man is a gambler. He loves the odd chance. That's where we are going to get him."

"You must admit that he's running a fearful risk," I observed.

"Nothing venture nothing win," said Granby, smiling at Ann.

"Damnation," I said.

Punctually on Friday afternoon Francis Wyndham arrived. I shall set down in the manner of an eye-witness what passed between him and Ann, though, as you very well imagine, I was not present at the interview, but have pieced it together from what she told me afterwards.

He showed not a sign of nervousness, but greeted her with a pleasant smile. He looked with distaste at the plush furniture, the velvet hangings and cuckoo clock upon the wall.

"A pretty indifferent mousetrap," he said. "You might have done me better than this, Ann, though I admit the bait could not have been better chosen."

That was a facer. He had come to the point with a vengeance, and Ann decided there and then to meet him on his own ground.

"If you knew it was a trap," she said, "why have you come?"

It rather seems to me that in putting this question Ann was, in the language of Henry James, asking for it. It certainly came—more than she had bargained for; she thought it would never cease. The brightness of her cheek, he said, would shame the stars as daylight doth a lamp; and her eyes, if in heaven, would through the airy region stream so bright, that birds would sing and think it were not night.

Then, strangely enough, they got down to brass tacks. Ann referred unblushingly to what had happened in the garden, so that, ere long Wyndham was once more asking her to marry him, though I am glad to say that she had by this time put the table between them.

"I might think of it," she said, "but on one condition."

"I am to release the King. Is it not so?"

His eyes were shining with excitement. Ann told me she had seen the same look once on the faces of three players in the Sporting Club at Monte Carlo.

"Do you realise," he continued, "that you are asking me to risk a fortune, perhaps my life? In the normal course of events the King is doomed. If the revolution fails he dies at once. If it succeeds, his removal is only a matter of time. You are asking me to work against my colleagues. You do not believe, perhaps, in honour among thieves."

"What has honour to do with the murder of a child?"

"A little later or sooner," he said. "Does it matter so much? The percentage of mortality among Balkan kings is high. Did you, may I ask, keep this appointment primarily to make this rather attractive bargain, or was it merely your object to get me here so that your friends might track me hence to our general headquarters?"

Ann did not know how she was expected to answer that. I should certainly not have known myself.

Wyndham sat on the table and lit a cigarette.

"I need hardly tell you," he continued lightly, "I have come prepared for both contingencies."

Then quite suddenly his expression changed. He sprang from the table, hurled his cigarette at the fire screen and coming round to Ann grasped her by the arms.

"Tell me, Ann," he said, "how do you think I come to be mixed up in this rather sordid business?"

His eyes were bright, and she could not evade them. He had all at once become fantastically sincere.

"I was born too late," he went on. "I am the last of the *condottieri*. I live in the Renaissance. I am a misfit in the modern world. I should be wearing a doublet slashed with crimson velvet with a dagger at my hip and by my side a long sword. And being in the presence of my lady, a velvet hat, with its ostrich feather and its diamond clasp, is slung across the hilt."

He sank to his knees, holding her hand with the tips of his fingers, and, as he looked up with his fevered eyes, I think she pitied him where another might have found him merely ridiculous.

"Outside," he went on, "my men are standing rank on rank in their armour of steel, with their halberds and flaunting headpieces and their red, lustful faces. My own armour is inlaid with gold, cupids dragging Silenus to the dance, or a drunken Bacchus in the arms of the Graces. Yesterday I was enthroned Archbishop of Milan, holding already the sees of fifty-seven bishoprics like Cæsar Borgia. The day before that, perhaps, I defied the Pope or struck an emperor across the mouth."

"The man is raving," thought Ann.

He rose to his feet and walked away from her. The light faded from his eyes.

"I am an anachronism," he went on. "That is my misfortune. I am an adventurer in an age when the word has an evil sense, but in the age to which I belong it was a

word of honour. It fitted the princes and cardinals of Italy, the seamen of England, the soldiers of France, the poets and scholars of every country in Europe. Remember, in judging me, Ann, that the whole difference between good and evil is frequently no more than a change in date and fashion. You are shocked perhaps by my present doings. My dear Ann, they are merely errors in chronology. You see what I have become. That is the penalty of being born out of my time. To-day I can only sell my wits to those whose hands are raised against a society in which I have tried in vain to find a place. Your modern princes of Leadenhall Street will have none of me. Probably they are right. Mammon and the Muses make strange company. I have even sunk so low as to become a pedagogue. For the moment I am in the service of Toliu, Ciuntu and the rest. But I owe allegiance to no man. If it is my whim to prefer your favour to the rewards of Toliu, I hold myself free to choose. But the mercenary must be paid. It is his only creed. And if I help you now to save the King, I must go to work in such a way that I may at least be able to save something for myself from the revolution I am helping to bring about. If I save the King, you will marry me. That is a bargain. But we were neither of us born to be poor. You remember Keats:

Love in a hut, with water and a crust
Is — Love, forgive us — cinders, ashes, dust."

He stopped at last and Ann, plucking up her courage, came round to him and laid a hand on his arm. He trembled as she touched him.

"Come over to us," she urged.

"What happens if I do?" he asked. "I get perhaps a free pardon at the most. We cannot live upon that."

"What about the three hundred and fifty thousand

francs which you have already received from Monsieur Dubosc?" Ann enquired.

Wyndham laughed shortly.

"Working expenses," he said. "All that money has gone to Roumania and every franc of it is being spent on the revolution."

He walked away from her as though he feared to trouble his wits.

"No, my dear," he continued. "I cannot come over to you openly. There is only one way out. I will save the King, but the revolution must go forward."

He sat down on the arm of a chair as he spoke and emphasised his points with a lean forefinger.

"Listen to this," he said. "The King must remain under the control of the Flamboys until the revolutionary party is securely seated. When we are masters of Roumania, and, judging by the way things are going, that will be in a few days from now, we shall at once raise the money we need on the Ortania well. I shall draw my own share of the spoil and quit the stage. Nobody will want me to stay. I swear that when that moment comes, I will contrive that the King shall go free. Is it a bargain?"

Ann looked at him for a moment without speaking. We had agreed that she should, if possible, try to get all his cards on the table.

"Suppose," she said, "I fail to see any reason why we should bargain at all. What, for example, is there to prevent me from communicating with my friends and having you arrested at once?"

His face darkened at that and then cleared as he assumed again his usual flippant air.

"That so much beauty," he said, "should go with so little sense. Your friends will make no effort to arrest me or even take any steps to that end for the same reason that they have so obligingly concealed our dealings with Soviet

Russia. Such action would ruin the prospects of our comparatively peaceful revolution and the death of King Peter would become an immediate political necessity. I have made you an offer. If you refuse it I shall return to the Flamboys and we shall go our separate ways as before."

"And if I accept it?" said Ann.

"In that case I have a further proposal to make. I suggest that you come back with me immediately to the place where the King is hidden, and remain with him till we hear from Ciuntu that the revolution is an accomplished fact. We shall then start at once for Roumania. All the arrangements are made. We shall go by air and the journey will be only a matter of hours. You shall come with me to Bucharest, and before you marry me the King shall go free. I am the brains of this show, and you may safely leave to me the ways and means of his escape."

"And if the revolution fails?" said Ann quietly.

"If it fails," said Wyndham, "we must keep the King and the bargain is off. You will in that case be sent back to your friends."

"Why should you keep the King if the revolution fails?"

"It will not fail. You are doubtless reading the newspapers. I need only say that we have private information more accurate than anything you have read and far more depressing, or perhaps I should say encouraging — from your point of view."

There was a pause after that. Ann went and stood by the window, gazing out across the trim roofs, broken only by the towers of the Cathedral, to the Jura beyond.

"If I consent," she said at last, turning towards him, where he stood by the table gazing at her with suspense in his eyes, "if I consent, will you swear not to come near me till the King is in the hands of his friends?"

"I swear," he answered solemnly.

"Very well, then," said Ann, "I agree."

On that he was a man transformed. He came at her with outstretched arms. She slipped aside and Wyndham found himself grasping the leaves of an aspidistra. So that strange interview ended in farce.

He turned abruptly and moved to the other end of the room. Then he swung round on her.

"How soon can you be ready, Ann?" he asked. "I would ask you, if possible, to meet me this evening at six o'clock by the plane tree in the Place Chevelu. I will ask you to wear your most inconspicuous clothes and to carry as little luggage as possible."

"I can be ready by six," said Ann, in a tone as formally courteous as his own. "Sooner, if you wish it."

"Six will be time enough," he replied. "I have other business in Geneva. Our worthy banker Dubosc is sadly in need of a little friendly counsel and encouragement."

"Isn't that rather dangerous?" Ann inquired. "Surely you must realise that Dubosc is under observation."

"Of course I realise it," he answered. "But you seem continually to forget the cardinal fact of the situation. I am for the moment inviolate. I am not to be touched, followed or hampered in any way. The King's life depends on my safe return. Tell Colonel Granby from me that if I am not back with my colleagues by midnight, the King dies."

He stood looking at her silently for a moment, and Ann began to fear that there would be a breakdown of his false composure. But suddenly he turned.

"Till six o'clock," he said abruptly, and in another moment had opened the door and was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

I GO SHOPPING WITH GRANBY

It was over a brace and a half of cocktails in Carlo's bar that I listened with Granby to Ann's account of the interview which I have just recorded. Ann had telephoned to us both as soon as Wyndham had left, and we met her by appointment, at about four o'clock — a bit early for cocktails perhaps, but the ex-McGuffie's thirst was insatiable. Granby listened with deep attention while my own mind was setting itself obstinately against a foregone conclusion. Ann had so obviously made up her mind. She had but one thought — to get back to the King, to find him, to care for him, to resume her charge. And Granby would back her up.

Granby did. We argued it out from every point of view, or rather it was myself that argued while they patted and soothed me as though I were a fractious child. My feeling in the matter did me credit. But this was not a subject on which I was likely to be reasonable or even sane. That was their attitude, and it rankled.

Granby made only one concession. At least that was how he put it.

"I quite understand, old boy," he said. "You can't bear to let Miss Winspeare out of your sight, which is only right and proper. Very well. We shall follow Wyndham when he goes off with Miss Winspeare, and you shall drive the car. That will be your job — just to keep the happy pair in view."

I looked at Granby doubtfully.

"Aren't you forgetting Wyndham's message? If we follow or molest him in any way, the King will die."

"Not a bit of it," said Granby. "We must interpret his message reasonably. Certainly if we were to follow him with a carload of policemen — well, the message would apply. He would, in fact, stop and ask what we supposed ourselves to be doing. But he won't mind being followed by just you and me. On the contrary, I think that is what he hopes and expects. Miss Winspeare has told us that he is prepared for such a contingency. He will drive on pleasantly. We follow him unsuspectingly till we are obliged to pull up, with Flamboys to right and left of us, and we surrender unconditionally to the last of the *condottieri*. That, I think, is the programme, according to Flamboy Francis. Any little variation will have to be mine. Granby will provide the grace-notes."

"Then you think that Wyndham has laid a trap for us," I said.

"I am pretty sure of it."

"And you propose to run straight into it?"

"I do."

"For what purpose?"

"Because I am so sly and artful. Flamboy Francis says policemen mustn't follow him back to his lair. Very well. We shall follow Wyndham and the police will follow us — at a distance — by signs to be revealed."

He looked at my sullen face and slapped me heartily on the back.

"Don't do that," I said irritably.

"Come, my knight of the rueful countenance," he urged. "Hence, loathed melancholy, of Cerberus and blackest midnight born! What more can I do for you? We are to follow Miss Winspeare into the toils. To get out of them again is my affair. I have thought this business out from A to Z. Leave to me the heartache and the thousand nat-

ural shocks. You have only to obey your instructions. Believe me, Flamboy Francis has overreached himself, and he will learn to his cost that he cannot combine the activities of a twentieth-century criminal with the exploits of Francesco Carmagnola. He'll find he's something more than an anachronism, and that the world will regard his little lapses as rather more serious than — how did he put it? — errors in chronology."

Shortly after that Ann decided to leave us. She wanted to change her dress for the journey and pack a suitcase.

We put her into a taxi, and my face must have been pretty eloquent as I watched her drive away, for Granby laid a hand on my arm.

"Don't worry," he said. "How can a girl like that spoil?"

"You are pushing her deliberately into the arms of that scoundrel, Wyndham," I said, trying to shake him off.

"Not into his arms," said Granby with a smile. "There is always the aspidistra."

Granby kept his hand firmly on my arm, and led me down the street. It was a warm afternoon, glowing with light and colour, and even the *rues basses* of Geneva were transformed.

"Do you think I would let her take this risk if there was any other way of finding the King?" continued Granby as we walked. "But there *is* no other way, and, if it were not for the high courage of Miss Winspeare, there would be no way at all."

"The police in this country," I began.

"The police," he interrupted, "are neither better nor worse here than anywhere else. How can you expect them to find a small boy, one of a thousand, of ten thousand? He may be running loose in the slums of St. Gervais, or

playing with a paper boat on the Arve. He may be one of a hundred screaming youngsters in the asphalt playgrounds. He may be looking after goats high up on the mountains. He may be shut away in some dark cellar, or at the top of a high tower. There is no limit to the possibilities. The police cannot find him. That is to be our job."

"But what exactly is your plan?" I asked. "So far it seems to be pretty sketchy."

We were passing the banked masses of flowers beneath the umbrellas in the Place du Molard, where the old women sit and sell all that is left to them of beauty.

"You know enough," said Granby. "We are to follow Ann. You are to drive the car and keep her in sight, whatever happens—do you understand?—whatever happens—And you must leave the rest to me. There are times when it is fatal for a man who is under orders to know too much. This is one of them. I'm your chief and it's up to you to do exactly as you are told—And now, by George, that's a very fine hat shop over there," he concluded suddenly.

I gazed at him in bewilderment.

"Come along," said Granby, and, gripping my arm more firmly than ever, he led me across the road, so that a moment later I found myself standing in front of a large and powdered dame, while in the background simpered two or three shopgirls, whose slim legs left little to be desired in the matter of shape or display.

"*Bonjour, Madame,*" said Granby. "Have you any feathers?"

"Feathers?" boomed the dame with a glance that would have stopped a basilisk in its stride.

"I know they are not fashionable," continued Granby.

"They are not, indeed," said the dame, "and if Monsieur is looking for a hat with feathers—"

"Not a hat," said Granby. "Feathers. Quite simply feathers. Of course, if Madame does not happen, in a shop so well-garnished, to have any of the articles in question —"

"One moment," said the dame, and, turning with a prodigious crackling of black bombazine, she moved, a stately yacht under easy sail, to some distant recess of the shop, tended by a fleet of little dinghies in the shape of the girls who seemed delighted with us. Anon she returned, bearing a cardboard box which she laid upon a rickety occasional table, one of those tables in fact which is never equal to the occasion. This one collapsed and the box, bursting open, spread a riotous cloud of feathers of all shapes, colours and sizes at our feet.

"Splendid," said Granby, dropping to his knees and beginning to pick over the heap.

"Some of them," madame assured us, "are the last cries. Others are not so much to the mode."

"I care nothing for the mode. I am, in fact, a sad individual — a poor type," murmured Granby, as he picked out some long quills of dyed goose feathers.

He eventually chose a dozen or so of all sorts, including a long false peacock feather slightly bent. He secured the lot for five francs, and we departed swiftly.

"Well," I said, as we stood again on the pavement, "are we going to dress up for this act? What is the notion? Do we follow Wyndham in war paint, complete with tomahawk? Perhaps you would like me to recommend you a toyshop?"

Granby nodded.

"You've done it in one," he said. "Where is the toyshop?"

I began to think he was mad, but he shook his head with a smile.

"No," he said. "The tenement is still occupied. There

are as yet, as our French friends would say, no spiders on the ceiling."

I pointed without comment to a corner house at the bottom of the Rue de la Madeleine, where a large sign announced that the toys of the Maison Weber were justly renowned. We entered the shop in silence.

"Have you," he asked, "of the English plasticine?"

This time his request was regarded as normal, and in five minutes we were outside again. Granby carrying a small parcel containing two tubes of that excellent clay.

"There is a game," he said to me, as we moved up the hill towards my flat beside the cathedral, "which we played in our youth. *Ichabod . . . labuntur anni . . . Quantum mutatus ab illo*. I am not the man I was. You stuck a lump of plasticine on the end of a feather and threw it at a chap."

"A good game," I said, "but, as a weapon against the Flamboys, it doesn't seem very adequate."

"More useful than you think," he answered, as I unlocked my own front door. "And now, my lad, what of that beer we have heard so much about?"

I had made no mention of beer, but I sought and found a couple of bottles deep in the cellar. Returning to the light of day, I found that Granby had dragged a table and two basket chairs out into the square in front of the cathedral, and was warming himself in the declining rays of the afternoon sun, soon to be cut off by the gabled roofs of the Home for young women who fear to be abandoned.

He was gazing at the Grecian portico which some bright eighteenth-century Genevese architect had clapped upon an otherwise beautiful Gothic church, and was absent-mindedly sticking little lumps of plasticine on the ends of his feathers. In silence I poured out the beer.

"A curious erection that," said Granby with a jerk of

his head in the direction of the cathedral. "But I suppose they couldn't help it."

Over the beer he became more explicit.

"Look here, young fellow my lad," he began, "there are several things to remember. You and I will be running after a motor car in which will be seated your lady love and the only man with any brains I have met for some time."

"Thank you," I murmured.

He had by now finished his work on the feather darts, which were lying in a neat row on the table.

"Put them in your pocket," he said.

In silence I obeyed.

"Now listen," he continued. "We are following the car in front."

"By the way," I interposed, "did anybody think to take its number? It might be a useful thing to know."

"Naturally," said Granby. "The car has been under observation since Wyndham kept his appointment with Ann. The number is 8808 A."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"8808 A," repeated Granby.

"But that is the number of my car," I objected.

Granby chuckled.

"Then you will be following your own car," he said.

"I hope it has got a good red light behind."

"Quite a good light," I answered.

"Very well. We follow Wyndham, and the police will follow us—at a distance. They must never be in sight or sound of the car in front. So whenever we take a turning you will throw out one of these feather darts into the hedge. You remember Theseus and the ball of thread."

I nodded.

"Wyndham is not sure that we shall follow him. In fact, he has tried to scare us from making the attempt.

But he is no fool, and he will be prepared. Put yourself in his place."

"I wish I were," I said, thinking of Ann. "But the fellow has put himself in mine."

"He will see us following. We cannot possibly avoid that, and we shall not even try. What will he do? He may pull up at once and order us off the field — with threats of what will happen to King Peter if we persist. But somehow I don't think he will. I think, as I have already suggested, that he will lead us on quietly and pleasantly to where his minions are waiting behind a hedge."

"They will capture us," I said.

Granby nodded.

"They will put us nicely out of the way till wanted," I continued.

Granby nodded again.

"And we shall then be rather worse off than we are now."

"On the contrary. The ambush must necessarily be arranged somewhere near to headquarters. Hence the feather darts."

There were a thousand questions in my mind, but he would not let me put one of them.

"We are to start," he said, "at 6 P. M. from the Place Chevelu. Do you know it?"

"Just off the Quai des Bergues," I replied.

"Exactly. It happens to be the home address of a friend of ours, and it will be pretty carefully watched this evening."

"You mean?"

"I mean that our friend Dumont has a small apartment on the first floor of an old house overlooking it. You may depend upon it that he will be watching to see that Wyndham gets safely away."

I looked at Granby in astonishment.

"Do you mean to say," I asked, "that the police know where Dumont is living and haven't arrested him?"

"I do. Dumont will be arrested as soon as we have definite knowledge of the whereabouts of the King. At present he is more useful loose than tied up. All his goings and comings are watched, and his telephone is being tapped. A smart fellow is Dumont — one of the brighter henchmen of Moussorsky. The way he struck down Radulara was worthy of Wyndham himself."

"I've often wondered how to murder speakers at the Assembly," I murmured.

"Nothing easier," Granby observed. "The press gallery is very narrow. There are only two rows of benches. The journalists were all craning forward. Any man standing behind them who knew how to throw a knife could at the right moment flick it neatly into the neck of the speaker, provided always that he was holding the house, and I gather that Radulara had everybody hanging on his lips."

At that moment the telephone bell rang and I left Granby with his beer and went into the flat to answer it. I returned in haste a few moments later.

"Granby," I said, "the Secretary-General wants to see us urgently."

Granby looked at his watch.

"What on earth does he want us for?" he demanded testily. "I explained the whole situation to him only yesterday. There must have been some further development. If my arrangements are upset —"

He did not finish the sentence.

We picked up a taxi in the Bourg de Four and drove to the Secretariat. Granby had lost that brisk air of adventure, which was so peculiarly his own, and had fallen into a gloomy silence.

We were sent up at once to the room of the Secretary-General.

"Come in, Baxter," he said, as I appeared at the door. "Good afternoon, Colonel Granby."

He was now, as always, quiet and businesslike. He was taking the events of the last few days as a matter of everyday concern — something it was his job to deal with as best he could, but nothing to justify panic or haste. But his face was very grave, and I realised with a sense of shock the extraordinary responsibilities reposing on his shoulders.

He was, in effect, the executive officer of the greatest experiment in international politics since the Holy Roman Empire, and the experiment was now vitally imperilled. Hitherto I had been living too fast to appreciate the real consequences of the intrigues in which I had become involved. I saw now in fancy the great land of Roumania, its endless plains and forests, its broken mountains and turbid rivers, a land swarming with illiterate peasants, led astray into a fine disorder, all unaware that they were betrayed in advance by their leaders to the Soviet invader.

It was of this and more that I instinctively thought when my eyes fell upon the three other men who were seated at the table. For they were the Foreign Ministers of Great Britain, France and Germany.

The Foreign Minister of Great Britain dropped his monocle, which fell with a faint clash on the table.

"Colonel Granby," he said, "events are moving very quickly in Roumania. We can only give you another twenty-four hours in which to find the King."

CHAPTER XIX

I AM UNDER-ENGINED FOR MY TONNAGE

A quarter of an hour later we stood once more outside the Secretariat of the League. There is no need for me to recount more of what passed between the great men and ourselves. Let it suffice that the news from Roumania was so bad that Granby himself was the first to agree to the ultimatum. Unless the King could be produced within twenty-four hours, all would be lost. The Regency had reached the last ditch. The loyalty of the troops was rapidly dissolving under the strain. Ciuntu was all but omnipotent. A word concerning his relations with the Soviets might still destroy him, but if that word were much longer delayed, it would be too late to stay the course of events. Granby, after listening to the latest reports from Bucharest, had allowed that, in the circumstances, twenty-four hours was a generous measure.

The Place Chevelu is perhaps ten minutes' walk from the Secretariat. We passed down the Rue des Paquis, and it was during that walk that Granby gave me my final instructions.

"Don't forget, young fellow my lad," he said, "whatever happens you are to carry on. You know exactly what you have to do. Hold on to Francis, and the police will hold on to us. We have everything up to ten thousand men."

"Are you sure that will be enough?" I inquired.

He ignored this.

"All the Swiss troops on manœuvres have been warned to stand by," he explained.

I began to realise what it was like to be sent about one's business by a staff officer, for Granby had everything planned to the minutest detail. The police car, which I was to drive was a two-seater Fiat, with ordinary number plates, but running in a certain series, beginning with zero, known to the police throughout Switzerland, and the car would not be stopped, however fast it might be travelling. As a last reminder that the evening was likely to be eventful, Granby thrust a loaded automatic into my pocket after satisfying himself that I knew how to use it.

We reached the Place Chevelu, by way of the Quartier St. Gervais, the Whitechapel of Geneva. We passed through narrow streets, cluttered with drays and market stalls, where husky women offered to sell us a variety of wares from woollen pullovers to live rabbits.

It was five minutes to six when we reached the little square, and there, in the cover afforded by a deep embrasure, leading to what had once been a stable but was now an eligible storeroom for hire at twenty francs a month, we took cover and waited.

I had seen the square a hundred times before, but I saw it now with a difference. It was quite small, not above fifty to sixty yards across, bounded on the south by the Quai des Bergues which ran alongside the Rhône as it left the lake. On the east was a large store that sold everything from teddy bears to bananas. On the west were some dilapidated houses, and on the north, beside the stable in which we had gone to ground, a greengrocer and a tobacconist. In addition to the Quai des Bergues, there were three small side streets which ran into the square, one almost immediately behind us and the other two coming from east and west respectively. The square itself was occupied by four plane trees, pruned in the Continental manner, to

afford the maximum of shade. They were in full leaf and pleasant to look upon. But for these trees the square was empty, save for a little newspaper kiosk at one corner next door to what the Continentals so picturesquely describe as "a hut of necessity."

My car, or rather the car which I was to drive, a grey painted two-seater Fiat of the new six-cylinder type, was under the trees pointing in the direction of the Hôtel des Bergues, so that I could immediately run to the main road and make straight for Lausanne. Wyndham would have to start in that direction unless he were making for the French frontier, a course which seemed to Granby and me to be extremely improbable. Of the police there was no sign, nor, though I scanned the windows, was any watcher to be descried. Apart from a few sounds in the streets behind us, the voice of an overworked mother chiding one of her numerous offspring and the pleasant sound, softened by distance, of the Rhône waters rushing over the weir by the Pont de la Machine, nothing was to be heard. The sleepiness of that late evening got upon my nerves.

"What am I doing here?" I suddenly exclaimed. "Why not get a policeman to drive you?"

I felt a hand on my arm.

"Steady the Buffs," came the voice of Granby. "Two minutes to zero. Always a bad moment. You've been in this from the start, and you don't want Ann to be rescued by a mere policeman, do you?"

"By God, no," I said.

"Hold hard," exclaimed Granby suddenly, "here she comes."

I saw Ann as he spoke. She was stepping from a taxi which had drawn up beside the cheap store. She paid off the man and moved towards us, carrying a light suitcase. No one to compare with her has ever crossed that dingy

square or ever will. She was in a coat and skirt, trim and very plain, and her head was high. She moved without effort, as though the suitcase were empty, very lovely, very determined, and so young. It was infamous to use such bait. It was not to be borne.

"Don't be a fool, laddie," whispered a voice in my ear, "she cannot spoil."

And even in that bitter moment I knew that Granby was right.

She stood near the kiosk by the plane tree, and rested her suitcase on the ground. Hardly, however, had she done so when I heard the purring of a motor, and round the corner of the Quai, coming from the main part of the town, slid my own green two-seater coupé with Wyndham at the wheel. He stopped at once on seeing Ann, not five yards from the Fiat which I was myself to drive. I saw him smile and raise his hat. Then he opened the door of my car. Ann moved forward. He took her suitcase and thrust it behind the seat on to the ledge where I had so often put a suitcase myself. She got into the car beside him. In a moment he had let in the clutch and had started off, as we had thought he would, along the Quai towards the Bergues and so to the Lausanne road.

I was to be restrained no longer. I moved from my hiding place. Granby, I think, was at my heels. At that very moment, however, a large vehicle, the sort of contraption that serves a double purpose, a delivery van on weekdays and on Sundays an open tourer, came hurtling down one of the side streets into the square.

It was full of men diversely attired, but all wearing large red and blue rosettes and along its sides was written: Society of the Friends of Instruction. The Friends of Instruction had evidently been studying the effects of alcohol upon the human organism. They sang of the vine and its history from the first appearance of the grape to the

ultimate destiny of the wine, while the car swayed dangerously across the square. I leaped for safety and avoided the edge of the front mudguard by the fraction of an inch. I heard a shout behind me and a scream of brakes. I stopped dead in my tracks and spun round, my hand on one of the plane trees, to see what, in that fraction of a second, my mind had learned to fear. Granby was lying in the middle of the square writhing, while the car with its drunken occupants swaying from side to side, disappeared with a grinding of gears up the other side street.

I ran to Granby and went down on my knees beside him. He turned to me a face twisted and grey with pain.

For a moment I could not speak. I said hoarsely when I had managed to get some control of my voice:

"Are you bad?"

"Leg," he said through his clenched teeth, "done in — felt it go — Carry on, old boy."

"I can't leave you here," I said.

"Carry on, I tell you," he repeated savagely, and I saw that it was as much as he could do to speak at all. "Forward on — Don't lose sight of Ann — We are done if you do."

I turned and jumped for the Fiat.

"The engine's warm," came Granby's voice from behind me faintly. "Don't muddle your gears."

The engine started at the first touch of the button and, as I turned to run up the Quai, I saw that already a Genevese *gendarme* was bending over Granby, and that a small crowd was beginning to collect in the square.

At the crossroads, by the Pont du Mont Blanc, I stopped a moment. The policeman on point duty, seeing the number plate of the car, saluted.

"Has a green two-seater coupé come this way?" I asked.

The man nodded and pointed down the Quai du Mont Blanc.

"Along there not two minutes ago," he said. "I held it to let a lorry through."

I sped onwards, and abreast of the Secretariat came within sight of my quarry.

The ensuing chase was a nightmare. Wyndham was driving my car at a fair pace, and I soon began to curse the makers for turning out so efficient an engine. But I hung on and did my best to appear as though I were not too obviously following. Hanging from the steering wheel of the car I was driving was a large pair of yellow goggles, and there was a leather motoring cap on the seat beside me. I contrived to slip on these useful aids to disguise and felt better. Then I pulled out the feather darts, and laid them on the seat beside me. I soon had occasion to use the first of them, for Wyndham presently swerved to the left and made as though to climb the steep hill to Chambesy. I threw the dart, as I turned, into the hedge. It did not seem to me to be a very obvious clue, but if I were caught, as seemed only too likely, the darts would be my only link with the world. Granby was now out of the running, but the police, I presumed, would act according to programme. I must say that the chance of their tracing me through the night with the help of a few feathers thrown into the hedgerows seemed to me most uncomfortably remote. I felt aghast at my responsibility. Orders, however, were orders, and I threw out a few more of them as we turned right-handed and made our way, still at high speed, through the twisting bylanes round Valavran and Les Tuileries, to the straight road which leads to Chavannes-de-Bogis.

From Chavannes-de-Bogis we headed for Crassier, and as we began to turn left, I realised that we were to climb the single road which crosses the Jura through St. Cergue

and over the pass of La Givrine down to Moraz. By this time darts were few, but it scarcely mattered, for there was but one road up, and it looked as if the Flamboys must have their headquarters somewhere near the head of the pass. The Fiat was running sweetly. It was a stiff pull for the car, the road winding steeply with sharp bends through a forest of firs and beeches. Every now and then, through clearings, I caught sight of the lake gleaming far below, with whorls and sprays of mist floating about it, and on the further side of it the long rampart of the Alps. The bends in the road became sharper and more numerous as we climbed. It should be easy now to find the lair of the Flamboys. Houses were scarce in these regions. I wondered whether, on reaching St. Cergue, still some distance away, it would not be well to stop for a moment, even at the risk of losing sight of Wyndham, and inform the police of the route he had taken. Unless he intended to cross the frontier into France which was, I thought, unlikely, St. Cergue or some point not far beyond it must be his destination.

To my surprise, however, at a point about a third of the way up, he took a turning to the left which I had never before noticed on my not very frequent trips to St. Cergue. The road, which was very narrow and steep, made a *détour* in the direction of Gex. I did not know whether it would run into the pass of La Faucille, or was merely a *cul-de-sac*. I threw out a dart and followed hopefully.

For the next twenty minutes the road became ever narrower and steeper, with frequent bends. There was no sign of any house or farm. Beech and firwood was all round me. The night was closing in, and the surface of the road grew continually worse. Soon I had completely lost my bearings.

I had just rounded a bend when it happened. There was a loud report, and the car skidded uncontrollably across

the road. I pulled up quickly and got out. It was as I thought. Both the front tyres had gone, and, bending down, I saw the reason. The road for some little distance in front was strewn with sharp tacks with broad heads, all sitting nicely with the point upwards. In the silence of the evening I could hear the familiar sound of my own car which Wyndham was driving some hundreds of yards ahead.

So Granby had been right. Flamboy Francis had led me into it. Where, however, was the ambush Granby had feared? I looked apprehensively into the shadows, but nothing moved. I was to be left to my own devices. What was I to do? I felt very forlorn and hopeless, miles from anywhere, my car out of commission until I could change the wheels. Luckily there were two spares.

How I cursed Granby. Why on earth had he taken this slim chance? A light flashed suddenly on the hillside above my head, and at the same moment the roar of the exhaust of the car in front ceased abruptly, and was then renewed with a double intensity. Either the road had suddenly changed from one in four to one in two, or Wyndham had turned a corner and left it.

This called for immediate investigation. I, therefore, postponed wheel-changing and started up the hill, keeping my eyes upon the road. Wyndham's tracks were still just visible. There could be no doubt about them for, as I have said more than once, he was driving my own car, and I knew the tyres rather well. Three of them were new, but the fourth, on the right rear wheel, was older and had a large patch on the outer cover which left a diamond print in the dust. It was a scandalous tyre, and should certainly not have been on the back wheel, but I was postponing the purchase of a new one till my account at the bank was convalescent.

Had Wyndham, I wondered, reckoned with the possi-

bility of being traced by his tyres? In these unfrequented parts they were a better guide than the feather darts. I still had two of them left, and the thought of them in my pocket caused me suddenly to laugh, though the joke was against me and pretty grim at that. Here was a gang of revolutionaries who had abducted a King from a Continental express and had, as I feared, assassinated a prime minister in the middle of a crowded assembly. And I was pursuing them over the mountains armed with two feather darts. Why had I not been attacked? Why had Wyndham chosen that particular spot to put an end to the chase? Had he only just noticed that he was being followed? On reflection this seemed only too likely, for, though my pursuit of him on the main road might easily pass unobserved, the case was altered on this unfrequented mountain track. Or were the Flamboys lying in wait as for a prey? The forest pressed close about me, silent and implacable. I moved forward:

Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And, having once turned round, walks on
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

I stopped once, but could hear only my own laboured breathing.

"Under-engined for your tonnage, old boy," I gasped.

The tracks of the car in front were still clear. There had been little rain of late, and the road was dusty. I soon found the explanation of the sounds I had heard. The wheel marks swerved across the road from right to left, and then quitted it altogether, taking a steep and narrow mountain path which rose abruptly to the left. The path was just wide enough to take a car, and had recently been hewn out of the mountain side, as was to be seen from

the number of felled trees and stacked undergrowth beside it.

For a moment I paused. That was obviously no thoroughfare. It must be a semiprivate track to a house or perhaps a small clearing on the mountain side. Should I go on? Or should I turn back for help? I decided to make sure of my quarry. It would certainly be some time before I could get into touch with the police.

I turned into the track, but before doing so I put one of my two remaining darts at the side of the road in order to mark the turning. I then went forward, my automatic in hand and alert for any unusual sound.

The track led me for twenty minutes or so deeper into the firs so that I was soon quite covered by their shade and could distinguish nothing but the faint gleam of the road in front of me. Rank on rank stood the firs, aloof and indescribably menacing. Above in the clear sky the first stars were beginning to show; in the forest there was no sound or sign of bird or beast, not even a friendly bat to flicker across the open path.

I went round a bend in the road. There, in front of me, a light was glowing red, like the eye of a primeval dragon. I slipped quickly to the side, seeing at once what it was — the rear light of my car. What was Wyndham doing? There came to my ears the crunching of tyres and the faint purring of an engine. He was turning. I looked about me for cover, for, if he swept round on me on the narrow road and caught me with his headlights, I was lost. There was a bank on my left, fairly steep, and I scrambled up it on hands and knees. Then, rather breathless, I peered over the edge. My car was about thirty yards below standing across the road, and Wyndham, in the headlights, was fumbling with the unpainted wooden door of a small hut or garage.

He had arrived. But where were the Flamboys? They

could not be living in a small wooden hut. I stared about me and presently I saw, faintly outlined against the sky, the sloping line of a large wooden chalet half hidden by trees about two hundred yards further on. With a purr and a little screech, as Wyndham missed a gear, my car slid into the garage and there came the sound of a key in the lock. Wyndham reappeared. I could just make out a slim form beside him.

"Let me take your bag, Ann," I heard him say, and they moved together up the darkness of the path. I had found the lair. An enormous elation possessed me. But would the luck hold? I could scarcely believe it. My mouth had gone dry and my hand trembled as, having climbed down to the track, I planted the last of the feather darts in the bank, attaching to it a scrap of paper torn from my diary on which I scribbled the single word "Finis." I dared not be more precise lest it should be found by some one other than the police.

I was quite clear in my mind what I must do—make tracks for the police car, change the wheels, turn it round and run it down the pass till I reached the nearest telephone.

I began to walk swiftly and quietly back to the corner where the track joined the road to St. Cergue. Every few yards I stopped and listened, but everything was very still. In a quarter of an hour I had reached the road and I began in my eagerness to run. I had not run twenty yards, however, before I heard a sound that brought me up short—the noise, in fact, of a car coming uphill towards me. It was coming round a bend so that before the headlights blinded me, I could see it in the light reflected from the silvery trunks of one or two great beeches.

I stood for an instant in stupefaction. It was the police car I had left more than half an hour ago, and some one had already replaced the wheels. Then, with an indescrib-

able feeling of relief, I caught sight of the driver. He wore a peaked cap and his epaulettes gleamed white.

It was a policeman.

Smart fellow. He had seen from the number plates that the derelict was a police car, had changed the wheels and was carrying on. He should, if I could manage it, be a sergeant or a general or whatever they call a super policeman in Switzerland. I held up my hand as the headlights swept round the corner.

"Halt," I shouted, and stepped to one side as the car drew up abreast of me.

I bent forward to speak to the driver.

"I have found them," I said rather incoherently.

The policeman raised his head from the wheel and leaned towards me. At the same time something cold and round touched me on the cheek.

"Are you coming quietly?" said Moussorsky.

CHAPTER XX

I LEARN WHAT IS IN STORE

I felt a hand upon my shoulder. There came a shuffle of footsteps. The hand shifted to my throat and began to squeeze. That was too much. I forgot all about Moussorsky's revolver and lashed out with my heels. There was a cry of pain. The hand that clutched my throat relaxed but at the same instant I received a clip under the ear which laid me flat in the road. Some one jumped on my back and got hold of my wrists which he tied together, while he sat on my head. He jumped up when his work was done. A stinging cut across my shoulder blades brought me to my knees and I turned about, with a cry which I could not stifle, to meet the face of Stepan the idiot, who mowed at me from the shadows. He held a cutting whip in his hand which he was apparently ready to use as often as required. On the other side of me was the deaf-mute, now watching the scene, or as much as he could see of it in the glare of the headlights, with an air of respectful interest.

"After you with me," I murmured faintly.

Moussorsky said something to Stepan and they bundled me into the car.

We went up the road, turned into the track and reached the garage where the car stopped and I got out. There they searched me, found my automatic and removed it. They then took me through a stout wooden and wire fence by way of an arched door, over which was a gay notice, printed in blue and gold; and I read in the light of a

torch which Moussorsky had produced — Beau Soleil: Holiday Home for Children.

We ascended a well-kept path, and the châlet itself loomed upon us in the dark. The door opened, and a flood of light streamed from the little hall into which we stepped. It was scarcely more than a passage, and it was hung with bright pictures — Cinderella trying on her slipper, with a handsome prince in Renaissance clothes kneeling before her, Père Nicolas or Santa Claus, Little Red Riding Hood, and, along one wall, the adventures of Becassine.

I was pushed through another door, into a charming room comfortably furnished with leather chairs. The walls were decorated with photographs of the Acropolis, Mount Olympus, the Roman Capitol and other classical monuments. There was a fire of logs burning in an open grate and round it a club fender with a padded seat.

On the fender was Wyndham, sitting at ease, his long legs clad in the grey trousers of the suit in which he had travelled from Geneva. He had taken off his coat, however, and was wearing a brilliant dressing gown of flame-coloured silk relieved with a pattern of acanthus leaves in gold.

I gazed at him stupidly. With a quizzical look at my dishevelled figure, he lifted a corner of the dressing gown.

"Florentine — *cinquecento*," he murmured.

I said the first thing that came into my head.

"Wyndham, you blackguard. What have you done with Ann?"

The Elizabethan brows lifted.

"My dear Baxter," he said, "Miss Winspeare is my guest. She came here, as you well know, of her own free will."

"And is free to leave when she chooses?"

"She has no desire to do so."

He turned to Moussorsky. He clearly had no wish to discuss the affairs of Ann before his colleague.

"What have you been doing to our friend?" he asked. "I can't possibly talk to a man who is trussed like a fowl."

He signed to the natural beside me, who, understanding his gesture, began to fumble at my wrists and presently my arms were free.

Wyndham then motioned to the servants to withdraw, but he was interrupted by Moussorsky.

"I'm not going to take any more chances with this fellow," he said, "not after what happened at Cologny."

Wyndham shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he replied, "if you feel as strongly as that about him, we had better have him under a supervision. Just tell your charming friend there, blowing bubbles, to stand by in case," and he pointed as he spoke to the idiot servant who was about to leave the room.

Moussorsky began to address the natural in Russian.

"He is saying," interrupted Wyndham, "that Stepan is responsible for your good behaviour. He is not to molest you in any way, but he is not to allow you out of his sight. Stepan is a simple soul and takes his instructions very literally. I'm afraid you'll find him a bit of an incubus."

His interpretation was cut short by a low buzz in the corner of the room, as though a large bluebottle had been confined to the sound box of a violin.

"Excuse me," murmured Wyndham, and getting negligently to his feet he crossed the room and picked up a bell-shaped telephone receiver.

"Yes," I heard him say in French, "we've got him all right. How's the Colonel?"

There was a pause while Wyndham listened.

"In hospital, you say . . . as bad as that . . . com-

pound fracture . . . six weeks at least . . . yes . . . come over by all means . . . as soon as you like, but be careful to leave nothing behind you . . . very well . . . we'll expect you about midnight . . . good-bye."

He laid down the telephone.

"It's Dumont," he said, "telephoning from the Place Chevelu."

Dumont, whispered my brain. What was it Granby had said? The police were watching him night and day. Even his telephone was tapped. And he had just telephoned to Wyndham.

I became aware that Wyndham's penetrating, mischievous eyes were surveying me.

"No, Baxter," he said. "We're not quite so simple as that. It's wireless — another of our little assets — product of the fertile brain which caused so much hilarity a few days ago among the police of Geneva."

My heart sank. It was a wireless telephone. The police could not tap that — probably did not even know of its existence.

"So that was Dumont," was all I could say.

"I'm sorry about Colonel Granby," Wyndham continued. "You heard what I said on the telephone — His leg is broken in three places. And that's straight from the stable, or perhaps I should say from the cantonal hospital, where Dumont, as the representative of a Swiss Insurance Company, has been making discreet inquiries.

"I'm really put out about the Colonel," he went on, lighting a cigarette. "His presence here would have rounded things off. I do so dislike unfinished work. I have not, however, done so badly, and you must forgive me, my dear Baxter, if I am a little bit above myself to-night. One loves to see the engineer hoist with his own petard — Springes to catch woodcocks, eh? And how did you like Moussorsky dressed up as a policeman?"

My thoughts had turned again to Ann. Was I never to see her? Did she, I wondered, know of my capture and, if so, how would it affect her bargain with Wyndham?

At that instant the door opened, and I took a quick step forward. I thought for a moment that it was Ann. But it was Mademoiselle Vallier who crossed the threshold. She wore a low-cut black velvet frock with a skirt long at the back and high in front. Round her throat was a magnificent rope of pearls. She had a high colour and swept into the room, without pause or hesitation, making straight at Wyndham where he stood in his fantastic dressing gown by the blazing fire. I was reminded of an occasion when swimming in the lake I had suddenly been attacked without warning by an indignant black swan. Her opening remark was superb.

"Francis," she exclaimed, "is this a zenana? What do you mean by bringing that girl here?"

"My dear Therèse, what else could I do?" he plaintively asked.

"You've brought her here to please yourself," she continued. "There wasn't the slightest necessity. You're playing false with that girl. I'm sure of it."

"Women," said Moussorsky suddenly, and spat into the middle of the sizzling logs.

"Spare me, Therèse," murmured Wyndham. "I would remind you that we are not alone, my dear."

"This concerns us all," she said with a sweep of her skirts. "A man in his position can't afford to mix his pleasures with his business. He will bring disaster on us all."

"Come, Therèse," said Wyndham sharply. "I brought Miss Winspeare here in the interests of you all, and for a very good reason. I knew that if I succeeded in persuading her to come with me she was bound to be followed."

"By the police," interrupted Mademoiselle Vallier.

"By Colonel Granby and Mr. Baxter," Wyndham calmly corrected her. "The police are negligible. Haven't they been searching the whole of Switzerland for the last week and making themselves a flouting-stock in the eyes of Europe? Our only danger lay in the activities of the two men whom I have now put out of commission. One of them is here, and the other is in the hospital. What more do you want?"

Mademoiselle Vallier looked unconvinced.

"What do you propose to do with Miss Winspeare?" she asked.

"That is my affair," said Wyndham. "I will not be held to account by any of you. I'm more than pulling my weight in this show, and I don't intend to be cross-examined by my subordinates."

"Francis! Do you dare to speak to me like that?"

"As a partner, yes. This is a matter of business."

He turned abruptly to Moussorsky.

"What's the latest news from Roumania?" he asked.

"Excellent," Moussorsky replied. "I had a message from Ciuntu this evening at about six o'clock. The Regent cannot hold out much longer. If he can't produce the King within the next twenty-four hours, it's all up with the royalists. The peasants have gone raving mad, and I don't think the Government can count, at the most, on more than two divisions of loyal troops."

"The news is as bad as it can be," broke in a voice with dramatic swiftness from the door.

We all looked round. By this time I had retreated to a corner by the fire where I seemed to be completely forgotten.

Little Toliu stood in the doorway. He was still in his striped trousers and black coat. But the neatness of his appearance only emphasised the disorder in his face,

which was white with amazement or terror. He was holding in his hand a copy of the *Tribune de Genève*.

"Read that," he said, holding out the paper to Mousorsky and Wyndham, who both stepped forward.

There was a moment's silence, except for the crackling of the newspaper as it was hastily spread wide. I watched them both anxiously as they read. What new development was this?

But Wyndham had taken up the newspaper and was beginning to read the long communication which, as I could see, filled almost the whole sheet.

"Our special representative," he read, "was privileged to have five minutes' conversation with the Prime Minister of Roumania, His Excellency Monsieur Radulara, victim of the dastardly attack in the Assembly of three days ago, which is the talk of the town. His Excellency, who could only speak in a low whisper, insisted, despite the remonstrances of his doctors, in making the following statement which he has asked should be given the fullest publicity."

"The fullest publicity," repeated Toliu.

Wyndham began rapidly to summarise the communication:

"Knife of the assassin . . . by God's providence failed to strike me down . . . no opportunity to finish my speech . . . finish it here and now . . . the Five Flamboys . . . infamous organisation . . . our King abducted and in peril . . . paid agents of Soviet Russia . . . two picked corps of the Red Army within striking distance of the frontier . . . Ciuntu and his colleagues . . . Toliu and others of foreign extraction . . . the Red hordes of Moscow . . ."

Wyndham paused.

"Need I go on?" he asked. "It's all here in Radulara's best vein, improved by a master of journalese."

"That's torn it," said Moussorsky.

Toliu crossed the room, and I heard the sound of spirit being poured into a glass, but no squirt of soda. Little Toliu was taking it neat. He turned round with the tumbler in his hand.

"We must leave at once for Bucharest," he said. "It's our only chance. I shall go myself to-night. We must get on to Dimier at Hautecombe. He must have the plane ready to start at midnight."

"Hell," said Moussorsky, "What are you whining about? Nothing could be better. The revolution is in full blast and nothing can stop it. What does it matter now if your fools of peasants know that we of Moscow are behind it? Radulara and his friends are down and out. They can't produce the King."

"But where is the money to come from?" said Toliu. "We sha'n't get another penny out of Dubosc after this."

"That is a detail," said Wyndham. "If the revolution succeeds and we get possession of the well, we shall soon find a bank to put up the money. Don't let that worry you, Toliu. We are perfectly safe, so long as we hold the King. There's no need to panic. This news won't get to Roumania before to-morrow morning at the earliest, and Ciuntu has the press well under control. I quite agree that you should both of you get off to Bucharest at once. But there is no violent hurry, and I don't advise you to risk flying by night. You can do the journey in six hours, less if only the two of you go. The plane will have a lighter load. I will stay here, and they will never find the King."

I looked enquiringly at Wyndham. Was he playing to keep his bargain with Ann? If they went off leaving him in charge of the King, the game would be in his hands.

But Moussorsky was also looking at Wyndham, and he thrust his brutal face into that of his colleague.

"You are right, comrade. They will never find the King — alive."

There was complete silence, and I found that my mouth had gone dry. Moussorsky would be pitiless. They would kill the King, as Granby had foreseen, and as Wyndham himself had threatened. Why had Radulara not been warned? He could have known nothing of the decision of the three Foreign Ministers to hold up their publication of the conspiracy. They had given us twenty-four hours.

Moussorsky looked slowly from one face to another of the small group. Little Toliu's eyes dropped, but his mouth was set, and with an absurd gesture he thrust his little black arm out and turned his thumb downwards to the floor.

What would Wyndham do? His obvious course, perhaps the only one he could take, was to agree to the murder of the King. Or would he double-cross his companions?

I was not long left in doubt. He answered the look of Moussorsky with an emphatic nod.

"You are right," he said. "We must proceed as we always intended to do. The King must die."

There was a rustle of skirts. Mademoiselle Vallier had moved forward.

"And the girl," she said.

"You bet, sister," replied Moussorsky.

At that I sprang forward. The movement was instinctive, and I had quite forgotten Stepan. A thin hand closed round my neck before I had gone a yard, and a heavy slobbering noise was in my ears. I kicked out desperately, but the grip tightened and the room began to swim, so that all I could see was the flame-coloured dressing gown of Wyndham which wavered like a fantastic banner.

"Let him go, you fool."

It was Wyndham's voice, and for once he seemed to be startled out of his usual calm. I heard a loud smack as

of a clown at the circus. The pressure on my throat was relaxed, and I staggered back gasping.

"I warned you, Baxter," Wyndham was saying, as I felt my throat tenderly and greedily gulped at the air. "Stepan is most attentive to his duties. You must be careful."

The idiot was at my side, holding a hand to his cheek.

"You can't stand by and see murder done," I gasped.

He looked at me quietly.

"Everything," he replied, "will be done in due order."

He turned to Moussorsky.

"I agree, of course, to your proposals," he said. "But there is no need for violent haste and there are several things to consider. Neither you nor Toliu can get to the Lac du Bourget without the help of Dumont. He alone knows the secret way over the French frontier by way of Annemasse. Without his guidance you are almost certain to be held up, and goodness knows what may happen. Dumont will not be here before midnight at earliest. I will, therefore, warn Dimier to be ready with the machine by seven o'clock to-morrow. That will give you plenty of time. The effect of this news will not begin to be felt in Roumania at earliest till to-morrow afternoon. You will thus arrive at the psychological moment, but you must arrive with authentic news of the King's death, and the facts must be decently presented."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Moussorsky.

Wyndham was speaking now in his usual manner, a little wearily, but with the air of a man who was prepared to be patient if necessary with creatures of less intelligence.

"Well, comrade," he said. "I don't know what you are proposing to do and say on the matter, but I can hardly think that you are prepared to announce to the people of Roumania that you have cut the King's throat with your own hand. All that Fee Faw Fum business may go

down well in Moscow, but child murder is a form of political advertisement which is not yet in fashion in countries still affecting to be civilised. Don't forget, moreover, that sooner or later, we've got to raise some more money. No one will refuse to do business with us. But the rate of interest will depend to some extent upon our record. Clean record, reasonable terms. Dirty record, simply ruinous. The King must die. But his death must appear to be an accident. He will be walking, shall we say, in the mountains. His body will be found at the foot of a precipice. The news will be in all the papers."

"What's the odds," growled Moussorsky. "We shall be suspected anyway."

"Suspicion is one thing and proof is another. People suspect only what they wish to believe, and the business men to whom we shall offer the Ortania well at terms which it would obviously be a pity to refuse will certainly not wish to believe the worst of us."

"Have it your own way," said Moussorsky. "But I don't intend to leave for Bucharest till I've seen the body."

"Comrade," said Wyndham, "your tastes are positively ghoulish, but they shall, if possible, be gratified. There shall be a special Habeas Corpus Act for your benefit."

At this point Toliu intervened.

"How is the — er — accident to be arranged?" he asked. "The boy is in our charge. How shall we disengage our responsibility?"

"The King is not in our charge," came a shrill voice from behind us all, and Mademoiselle Vallier, with heightened colour and a vindictive look in her eyes, came forward into the circle.

Wyndham caught her by the arm, and I could see from where I stood that his grip was by no means light upon her soft flesh.

"Hold your tongue, Therèse," he said sharply.

But she shook him off.

"I insist on being heard," she said, breathing quickly. "You are quick, Francis. You know what I am going to say. The King is not in our charge. He is in the charge of Miss Winspeare, appointed for that purpose by the Regent himself. Early to-morrow morning she will take him for a walk. There will be an accident, and they will both be found together. The press will have full particulars of the discovery, special emphasis being laid on the fact that Miss Winspeare has been his personal attendant and governess for the last six months."

There was a slight pause.

Toliu looked at the others inquiringly.

"What do you think of that?" he asked. "It seems to me to be most ingenious. Any objection, Wyndham?"

This was a savage in a waistcoat with a white slip to it. The French polish was wearing pretty thin.

Wyndham looked from one to another of the group, and I saw that his long hands were twisting a fold of his dressing gown tightly behind his back.

"No," he said at last, "I must confess that it seems an admirable arrangement.

"Then we agree," said Toliu.

"One moment," Moussorsky intervened. "It is a good plan, but I have one small amendment to propose. We are forgetting Baxter."

They all turned and looked at me. For the moment I think they had forgotten I was there. Then the eyes of little Toliu shifted, and he looked uneasily away towards the others.

"Well," he said, "this is not a time to be squeamish. This young man has been doing his best to defeat our plans from the start. I think he should accompany Miss Winspeare. It is the fortune of war. What do you say, Wyndham?"

I found Wyndham's eyes fixed upon me intently, and he was still looking at me when he said:

"Wholesale or retail. Moussorsky prefers the more respectable line of business, and I am inclined to agree with him. I think it extremely desirable that when the end comes Baxter should also be there."

CHAPTER XXI

I WALK TO MY DEATH

I will not recount in detail the rest of that conversation. I did not, in fact, hear very much more of it, for I was shortly afterwards taken to my quarters for the night — a kind of cellar in the basement of the house used for storing wine and fruit, in which there were rows of shelves laden with apples — apples again — I was once fond of apples, but the Flamboys were doing their best to cure me of my taste for them.

We were to start at dawn for the spot which had been selected for our "accident." The cellar had the chill of the high mountains in autumn, and I think some of the chill of death got into my bones. I sat, for the most part, huddled upon a pile of logs, going over the slim chances that remained to us. Wyndham, who had been scheming against his confederates, had been obliged to acquiesce in their plans. He had sworn, if the King should die, that Ann should go free, but he had quietly and almost without a struggle agreed that she also should perish. That was the end of his fantastic airs. I did not quarrel with his decision to make an end of me. I was his enemy, and, as little Toliu had said, it was the fortune of war. But when I thought of his cowardly betrayal of Ann, I was seized with fits of anger that brought me more than once to my feet and set me pacing restlessly in that eerie place, lit by the shafts of the late risen moon that came from the big gratings level with the ground above.

It was a hundred chances to one that the police would

not be able to find those feather darts in time. That would need the light of day, and we were to go to our deaths at dawn. Had Granby been free, I might have hoped against hope; for I had learned to have an almost fanatical faith in his ability to win through. But Granby was lying in the cantonal hospital in Geneva with a shattered leg.

Would Wyndham really allow Ann to go to her death? Perhaps he would even yet contrive to save her, and I should go alone up the mountain at dawn to die with the laughing child I had met on the downs at Freshwater — not a week ago. It was incredible that Ann should die like that — so slim and straight, to be broken on the crags, a girl who could not spoil. I found myself suddenly sobbing with my head in my hands at the memory of Granby's words. At least we should die together, and though we might not know love in life, we might find it in death. You will observe to what a state I was reduced.

I prayed that she would never know of what was in store till the moment came. But would it ever come? I found it difficult to believe. Hitherto the fantastic progress of my adventures had blinded me to the sordid reality beneath. Even when Moussorsky had fired at me from the Villa Mont Allègre I had not really grasped the significance of his act — murder — murderers did of course exist — But was this how they behaved? I did not know. I had never met a murderer before.

Very slowly a little light began at last to creep into the cellar through the barred ventilators. But everything was still grey and indistinct, when the door abruptly opened and Stepan appeared, a lantern and a big silk handkerchief in his hand. The lantern he stood on the ground. Then he approached and indicated by gestures that, if I struggled, he was prepared to resort to such

violence as was necessary. He produced a piece of rope from his pocket, bound my hands behind my back, and with the handkerchief blindfolded my eyes. He then thrust me from the cellar.

I stumbled up some steps and along a passage. Then, by the fresh air on my face, I felt that I was in the open.

"It's getting late," came the voice of Moussorsky.

I stood a moment helpless. There were slight sounds about me of people in movement.

"Ann," I said.

"My dear," said a voice almost at my elbow.

I turned in the direction, straining at the ropes that bound me.

"Ann, darling," I said, "I cannot see. Can you hear what I say?"

"I am just beside you," came the quiet voice.

"Ann, I meant to save you."

"It's all right, John. Don't worry. And be careful what you say."

She dropped her voice to a whisper. "The boy does not know what they are going to do. I've promised to go quietly if they do not tell him. I could not bear to see him terrified."

"Ann, dear," I whispered back, "I love you more than I can ever say."

I felt her arms about my neck and her mouth on mine. I could do nothing but stand there like a fool, with her tears on my cheek.

"A pretty picture," came the voice of Moussorsky from somewhere further off. "But you will have all eternity for that."

I could not believe it even then.

"Bring the boy, Stepan," went on Moussorsky, "but he's not to be frightened. We don't want any squalling."

I heard a light step from somewhere behind me, and suddenly the voice of Wyndham.

"Moussorsky, you are incorrigible. Why should it be necessary to blindfold Mr. Baxter? Do you grudge him his last look at the sun?"

I felt him beside me, as he spoke, and suddenly the handkerchief was pulled from my eyes, and I stood blinking in the early morning light.

The first thing I saw was Stepan carrying my soft hat and a walking stick which I had never seen before. Of course, I had forgotten. My death was to be an accident, the result of a careless movement walking on a dangerous path. Naturally my hat and stick would go with me.

Stepan, indeed, placed my hat on my head before we started.

Wyndham was beside me. His handsome face was expressionless, but he seemed entirely calm and master of himself. The hand that had torn the bandage from my eyes was firm. But he would not look me in the face, nor did he once even glance towards Ann, who was standing a little in front of me. She was free and, though she was a little pale, her lips were firm set. Moussorsky stood further off looking impatiently towards the door through which I had been taken on the previous night. No one seemed as yet astir but ourselves.

Then suddenly the door opened, and Mademoiselle Vallier appeared. She was wearing a bright orange jumper and a brown skirt, both of them the "last cries" as the lady who had sold the feathers would have said. I smiled grimly at the recollection, remembering, in particular, the last of them I had planted in the road outside and the piece of paper with the word "finis" written upon it. Finis—

Mademoiselle Vallier was leading Peter by the hand.

He looked brown and well, with bare feet protected by sandals and a short blue smock and knickers of linen. He did not see me, but ran to Ann, who moved with him towards the road. She evidently did not wish him to notice that my hands were bound.

We were standing in the compound of the *châlet*, if I may call it so. It was still only just dawn, but I could already distinguish the pines and the sky above me was of the deepest blue, paling softly under the first assault of the sun, which in another quarter of an hour would be showing over the distant Alps.

"Five o'clock," said Moussorsky abruptly. "Time we started."

"There is no need for you to come, *Therèse*," said Wyndham. "You had better stay behind and see that *Toliu* and *Dumont* have got everything they need."

"I shall certainly come," she answered promptly.

She moved to the side of Ann as she spoke. She was evidently leaving nothing to chance.

Wyndham shrugged his shoulders, and, rather to my surprise, gave in immediately.

"Take the boy on with you," he called.

"And for God's sake get a move on," said Moussorsky, from the door by the fence. "Those children will be all over the place in a minute."

He jerked his head in the direction of the *châlet* as he spoke. His reference to the children puzzled me for a moment. Then I realised to what he was referring. The *châlet* in which we had passed the night was one of the mountain schools common in Switzerland, to which delicate children are sent to be educated for the most part in the open air. On the mountain side under the trees were desks and forms, and lower down I could just see a charming playground fitted with swings and bars and a running track with every sort of contrivance for the amusement

and exercise of the pupils. In another two hours or so the place would be full of laughing children, dressed like Peter but naked to the waist as I had often seen them in such places. By that time — My mind refused to go forward. It went back, rather, to the vague reference that Wyndham had made in the train from Calais to a school in Switzerland in which he was financially interested. It was like Wyndham to send the King to a place where children would naturally be sought. What better hiding place for a leaf than a forest or for a jewel than the crown of a king, for a child than a company of children?

But already we had started. Peter and Ann, with Mademoiselle Vallier, were in front, the boy running quite happily beside them, and chatting twenty to the dozen. His bright eager voice came to me in snatches. For an instant I staggered in the road; something seemed to be choking me, pity or rage, I did not know. The hand of Stepan on my shoulder recalled me to myself, and I began to walk steadily forward beside Moussorsky. At all costs the boy must never know. And yet to see him thus, laughing and unaware, was intolerable. I looked at Wyndham, but still he carefully avoided my eyes.

We began almost at once to follow a narrow path that led us, away from the chalet and the track approaching it, up through the pines to the lower spurs of the Dôle.

We went on up the path in complete silence except for the rustling of our feet and the heavy breathing of Mousorsky, who was evidently in bad condition for the climb. The light was coming fast, and the hues of the morning were spreading over the sky. Soon the path was more level, and the trees began to grow thin.

"Five minutes," said Wyndham, and he began to move at a slightly quicker pace. Peter, still with Ann and Mademoiselle Vallier, was round a turn of the path, for

the moment out of sight. Then suddenly we turned the corner and came upon them.

They stood, close together, Peter a little awed by the place in which we found ourselves. The path here skirted a small precipice, perhaps a hundred feet in depth and quite perpendicular, which formed one side of an outcrop of rock, upon which no pines grew, protruding from the mountain side. The main peak towered above our heads for nearly six thousand feet. We were about two thirds of the way to the summit and looking full south.

"A magnificent view, is it not?" said Wyndham lightly.

At any other time I might have agreed with him. The Alps, fifty miles away, were ablaze, with Mont Blanc for a crowning splendour. Some half-forgotten lines sounded in a distant corner of my mind:

I dreamed last night a dome of beaten gold
To be a counter glory to the sun.

Then Moussorsky said something abruptly in Russian, and I saw Stepan move towards Ann and the child. Peter had in the meantime caught sight of me.

"Hullo!" he said, and would have started forward, but Mademoiselle Vallier caught him firmly by the hand.

"Let me go," he said imperiously.

"No," said Ann, bending over him and shielding him with her body. "You must stay here with me, Peter."

Moussorsky had moved aside to a flat rock which jutted from the path, and was looking over the edge.

"It could not be better," he said. "Look where the path is worn away. What could be more natural than a slip? It's a sheer drop. You needn't be squeamish, Wyndham. They will be unconscious long before they touch bottom. There's no need to use your chloroform, unless you'd like to give Mr. Baxter a whiff of it before we free his hands."

Peter, from Ann's skirts, was gazing at us with a puzzled look in his eyes, and suddenly I longed to get it over — before he should realise what was going to happen. Ann, too — God, in a moment I should go mad. I could see her arm, tensely wrapped about the child — Nothing would ever get them apart. They would die together.

I became aware of Wyndham approaching me with a large white handkerchief in one hand and in the other a small blue medicine bottle. He turned the bottle over upon the handkerchief and shook it for a moment. A sickly smell tainted the freshness of the morning.

"Tilt your head back," he said, and moved towards me.

In another instant the handkerchief was pressed to my face. I could smell the chloroform — but the handkerchief was dry. Before I had time to feel astonishment at this, there came a quick low voice in my ear.

"Stand by," it said. "I'm going to cut you loose."

I opened my eyes and met those of Wyndham. They were expressionless, and his mouth was set. One of his hands was round my waist, as though to prevent me falling when the chloroform began to work.

"Sway," he whispered. "Close your eyes as though the chloroform was working."

I swayed and leaned heavily against him. I felt a tug at my wrists, and a sharp pain in one of them as the point of his knife scored my flesh. I was free.

"Now," shouted Wyndham suddenly, and before I could open my eyes a pistol went off with a deafening report. I saw two things. One was Wyndham, a smoking pistol in his right hand, and the other was Stepan rushing towards me with his arm raised.

I swung round and laid him out with a clip under the jaw into which I put all the force and fury that was in me. He went down like a log.

Shaken by the force of my own blow I turned to Wyndham, but found myself confronted by Moussorsky. He was shouting something in Russian. He was red with fury, and the pistol in his hand was levelled full at my face. I leapt at him desperately and, tripping over a jutting rock, fell forward. The fall saved my life. There was a second report, and my hat was lifted from my head. But in another instant I had Moussorsky round the knees, and we crashed heavily to the ground together. I rolled sideways, and jerking my head back, I saw, as my face rubbed unpleasantly against the roughness of his waistcoat, that both his red hands were empty. He had dropped his pistol. Then he had me by the throat. Always my throat.

After that I had no attention to spare for anything that might be happening about me, though even as I grappled with my man I remember hearing a quick patter of footsteps, a shrill scream and the crying of Peter. I got my knee into Moussorsky's stomach, but he hung on to my throat till I felt my strength beginning to fail. One of my hands touched something on the path. It was a stone. I picked it up and began to batter at the side of his head. His breath came in hot gusts across my face. But he still clung on. Vaguely as I fought, a great cry came to my ears, followed by a scuffling and scrambling of stone. But Moussorsky had got me. There was no force in the blows I was aiming at the great square head of the man with the gripping fingers. It was no good. I was done. Yes, by Jove, done brown. It was growing dark and, for a final vision, mocking me was a face, I knew, looking over Moussorsky's shoulder, the face of Granby — This was the end, and I fell back.

I don't know whether I fainted. The trees and sky seemed to mingle together.

The next thing I remember was sitting with my back against a rock, looking in amazement at an indeterminate

number of men in blue and olive green uniforms. Mousorsky no longer had me by the throat. He was, on the contrary, standing at quite a respectable distance, and on each side of him was one of the men who had sprung thus suddenly into the landscape.

"*Ça va, Monsieur?*" said a voice in my ear. A bearded policeman of the Canton de Vaud was bending over me. He had a flask in his hand which he held to my lips. Something was burning my throat. I sat up weakly, and got as far as my knees.

"Ann," I said, or rather tried to say, for my voice was still strangled.

The *gendarme* moved aside.

What was this? Arms round my neck, and Ann beside me, kneeling, her eyes full of tears, her lips trembling, not six inches away. I did the only possible thing. I bent forward and kissed them.

"Well done, Baxter," came a voice in my ear.

I looked up in amazement.

"Granby!" I muttered.

"Merry and bright," he said.

He reached me a hand and pulled me to my feet.

"Can you stand up?" he asked.

"Of course I can," I said indignantly. "But — but I'm getting a little tired of the part of Hairbreadth Harry."

Ann was now a little way off, comforting the frightened Peter.

I looked quickly about me.

"Where are Wyndham and Mademoiselle Vallier?" I asked.

Granby, who was by my side, pointed grimly to the bottom of the precipice.

Instinctively I moved forward to the flat stone. A leg in a smart grey flannel trouser and brown shoe stuck out of some undergrowth, and I caught a glimpse of a patch

of orange and of something which might once have been a human face.

"She went for Ann the minute he cut you free," said Granby. "Wyndham ran between them, and she turned on him like a fury. They fell over together. You were not very far from the edge yourself," and he pointed to the traces of my struggle with Moussorsky.

"He kept faith after all," I found myself saying.

Granby nodded without a word.

I turned and came face to face with King Peter of Roumania. The child, scared as well he might be, had begun to cry, but, even as I looked at him, he rubbed his eyes with his sleeve and gazed up at the two big *gendarmes* who were standing beside him. Very royally he drew himself up.

"You are fatter than my guards at home," he said. "I wish my guards were as fat."

It was half an hour later in the *châlet*, over some black coffee which Ann herself had made, with a liberal lashing of kirsch, that Granby gave us a few necessary explanations.

"In the words of the immortal Pickwick," I said, "you are a humbug."

"It could not have been done, not as effectively, in any other way," he replied. "There was Dumont with his nose to the window pane. I was not going to trust any one but myself to pick up those feathers in the light of the moon, and it was essential that Wyndham, who was out to get us both, should think I was for the moment laid by the leg. Hence the little comedy in the *Place Chevelu*."

"That's all very well," I grumbled. "But you needn't have made a fool of me as well. You might have thought of my feelings."

"A bad quarter of an hour, what?" said Granby, put-

ting his arm about my shoulder. "But believe me, it was better so. Wyndham was as sharp as a needle, and I was not sure whether your behaviour, if you had known that my broken leg was a sham, would have been altogether convincing. Wyndham was an expert, and I thought it better to relieve you of any necessity to strike the appropriate attitude. They would never have waited till dawn if there had been the least suspicion that I was not *hors de combat*."

"It certainly looked genuine enough," I rather sourly admitted. "How did you contrive it?"

"I arranged it with the police beforehand," said Granby. "It was they who manned the car that broke my leg in three places, and they incidentally libelled a perfectly respectable Genevese Society. Rather a good show, don't you think? Then the moment you disappeared, the local policeman, not in the street, came on the scene, called up a doctor and an ambulance, and drove me off to the cantonal hospital. I went in by the front door and came out by the back. By that time, of course, it was pretty dark. We started after you as soon as we could. Till the moon rose it was tedious picking up the feathers, but things were easier when we took the road to St. Cergue, for we knew it for a long lane that had no turning. Meanwhile, another car was following Dumont, but Dumont is no fool, and he led his pursuers a pretty dance which eventually ended up in a farmhouse from which he neglected to reappear. The artful devil had a change of clothes inside. He put them on and walked through the police as bold as brass, reaching the *châlet* here not half an hour before we did. We got to the *châlet* ourselves fifteen minutes after you had started for the death walk."

I shuddered. But he allowed me no time for thought.

"We lost no time, but just walked in and arrested little Toliu and Dumont. Toliu broke down at once. I was not

very gentle with him, and soon persuaded him to show us where you had gone. Thank God we were in time, though if it hadn't been for Wyndham —"

"He kept to his bargain," I said.

"Yes," said Granby. "I'm rather glad it ended like that. He would have been bored to death in gaol, and there's no hanging in Switzerland."

There was a pause in the conversation. I got up and stretched myself. How wonderful it was to stretch one's arms and breathe again. Here was full morning. The birds were alive in the wood.

"What will become of Peter?" I asked.

Granby came and stood beside me in the window.

"He will be taken to Roumania at once. I have telephoned to the Secretary-General who has wired to the Regent, and in a few hours the news of his discovery will be placarded in Bucharest. Please God this will be the end of the revolution."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

Granby pointed silently through the window. It gave on an open space at the back of the chalet. There were perhaps twenty small boys from eight to twelve years of age, running naked in the morning sunshine, which gleamed on their brown bodies and supple limbs. The air was full of their shouting and laughter. Among them was Peter.

Suddenly I caught sight of Ann, standing by the white fence of the playground.

I climbed to the window sill and jumped to the ground outside.

Ann reached out her hand to me as I came, and together we stood by the gate watching the naked children in the sunlight.

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